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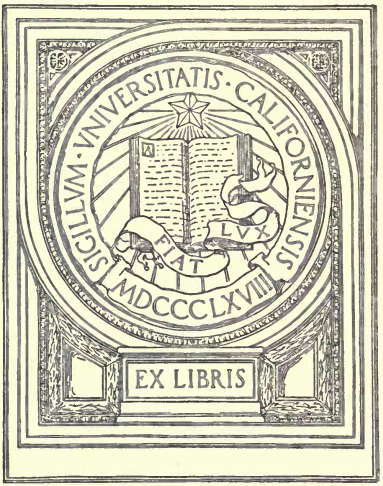

SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

Publiſhed from the original Manuſcripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

VOL. I.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A REVIEW of his Grace's LIFE and CHARACTER.

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A

REVIEW

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

DR. THOMAS SECKER, late Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*, was born in the Year 1693, at a ſmall Village called *Sibthorp*, in the Vale of *Belvoir*, *Nottinghamſhire*. His Father was a Proteſtant Diſſenter, a pious, virtuous, and ſenſible Man, who, having a ſmall paternal Fortune, followed no Profeſſion. His Mother was the Daughter of Mr. GEORGE BROUGH, of *Shelton*, in the County of *Nottingham*, a ſubſtantial Gentleman-Farmer. He received his Education at ſeveral private Schools and Academies in the Country, being obliged by various Accidents to change

his Maſters frequently. Notwithſtanding this evident Diſadvantage, at the Age of Nineteen he had not only made a conſiderable Progreſs in *Greek* and *Latin*, and read the beſt and moſt difficult Writers in both Languages, but had acquired a Knowledge of *French*, *Hebrew*, *Chaldee*, and *Syriac*, had learned *Geography*, *Logic*, *Algebra*, *Geometry*, *Conic Sections*, and gone through a Courſe of Lectures on *Jewiſh Antiquities*, and other Points, preparatory to the critical Study of the *Bible*. At the ſame Time, in one or other of thoſe Seminaries, he had the good Fortune to meet, and to form an Acquaintance, with ſeveral Perſons of great Abilities. Amongſt the reſt, in the Academy of one Mr. JONES, kept firſt at *Glouceſter*, then at *Tewkeſbury*, he laid the Foundation of a ſtrict Friendſhip with Mr. JOSEPH BUTLER, afterwards Biſhop of *Durham*. At the laſt of thoſe two Places it was that Mr. BUTLER gave the firſt Proof of his great Sagacity and Depth of Thought in the Letters which he then wrote to Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE; laying before him the Doubts that had ariſen in his Mind, concerning the Concluſiveneſs of ſome Arguments in the DOCTOR's *Demonſtration of the Being and Attributes of God*. Theſe were written with

ſo

ſo much Candour, Modeſty, and good Senſe, that, on the Diſcovery of his Name, they immediately procured him the Friendſhip of that eminent Man, and were afterwards printed at the End of his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*. This Correſpondence was entruſted in Confidence to Mr. SECKER, who, in Order to keep it private, undertook to convey Mr. BUTLER's Letters to the Poſt-Office at *Glouceſter*, and to bring back Dr. CLARKE's Anſwers.

Mr. SECKER had been deſtined by his Father for Orders amongſt the Diſſenters. With this View, during the laſt Years of his Education, his Studies were chiefly turned towards Divinity; in which he made ſuch quick Advances, that, by the Time he was Three-and-twenty, he had read over carefully a great Part of the Scriptures, particularly the *New Teſtament* in the Original, and the beſt Comments upon it; *Euſebius's Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, *the Apoſtolical Fathers*, *Whiſton's Primitive Chriſtianity*, and the principal Writers for and againſt Miniſterial and Lay-Conformity; with many others of the moſt eſteemed Treatiſes in Theology. But though the Reſult of theſe Enquiries was (what might naturally be expected) a well-grounded Belief of the Chriſtian Revelation, yet not be-

ing at that Time able to decide on ſome abſtruſe ſpeculative Doctrines, nor to determine abſolutely what Communion he ſhould embrace; he reſolved, like a wiſe and honeſt Man, to purſue ſome Profeſſion, which ſhould leave him at Liberty to weigh theſe Things more maturely in his Thoughts, and not oblige him to declare, or teach publicly, Opinions which were not yet thoroughly ſettled in his own Mind. Therefore about the End of the Year 1716 he applied himſelf to the Study of Phyſic; and after gaining all the Inſight into it he could, by reading the uſual preparatory Books, and attending the beſt Lectures during that and the following Winter in *London*; in Order to improve himſelf ſtill more, in *January* 1718-19 he went to *Paris*. There he lodged *au Cloitre St. Benoit, Rue des Mathurins*, in the ſame Houſe with Mr. WINSLOW, the famous Anatomiſt, whoſe Lectures he attended, as he did thoſe of the *Materia Medica*, *Chymiſtry*, and *Botany*, at the *King's Gardens*. The Operations of *Surgery* he ſaw at the *Hôtel Dieu*, and attended alſo for ſome Time M. GREGOIRE, the *Accoucheur*, but without any Deſign of ever practiſing that or any other Branch of *Surgery*. Here he became acquainted with

with ALBINUS, afterwards Profeſſor at *Leyden*, Father MONTFAUCON, and ſeveral other Perſons of Note. Here too was his firſt Knowledge of Mr. MARTIN BENSON, afterwards Biſhop of *Glouceſter*, one of the moſt agreeable and virtuous Men of his Time, with whom he quickly became much connected, and not many Years after was united to him by the ſtrongeſt Bonds of Affinity, as well as Affection.

During the Whole of Mr. SECKER's Continuance at *Paris*, he kept up a conſtant Correſpondence with Mr. BUTLER, who before this Time had taken Orders, and on the Recommendation of Dr. CLARKE, and Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, Son to Biſhop TALBOT, was appointed by Sir JOSEPH JEKYLL, Preacher at the Rolls. Mr. BUTLER took Occaſion to mention his Friend Mr. SECKER, without his Knowledge, to Mr. TALBOT; who promiſed, in Caſe he choſe to take Orders in the Church of *England*, to engage the Biſhop his Father to provide for him. This was communicated to Mr. SECKER in a Letter from Mr. BUTLER, about the Beginning of *May*, 1720. He had not at that Time come to any Reſolution of quitting the Study of Phyſic; but he began to fore-

ſee many Obſtacles to his purſuing that Profeſſion; and having never diſcontinued his Application to Theology, his former Difficulties, both with Regard to Conformity and ſome other doubtful Points, had gradually leſſened, as his Judgement became ſtronger, and his Reading and Knowledge more extenſive. It appears alſo from two of his Letters ſtill in Being, written from *Paris* to a Friend in *England*, (both of them prior to the Date of Mr. BUTLER's abovementioned) that he was greatly diſſatisfied with the Diviſions and Diſturbances which at that particular Period prevailed amongſt the Diſſenters. In this State of Mind Mr. BUTLER's unexpected Propoſal found him, which he was therefore very well diſpoſed to take into Conſideration; and after deliberating carefully on the Subject of ſuch a Change for upwards of two Months, he reſolved at length to embrace the Offer, and for that Purpoſe quitted *France* the latter End of *July*, or Beginning of *Auguſt*, 1720.

On his Arrival in *England* he was introduced to Mr. TALBOT, with whom he cultivated a cloſe Acquaintance. But it was unfortunately of very ſhort Duration. For in the Month of *December* that Gentleman caught the Small-Pox, and died. This was a great Shock to all his

his Friends, who had juſtly conceived the higheſt Expectations of him, but eſpecially to an amiable Lady whom he had lately married, and who was very near ſinking under ſo ſudden and grievous a Stroke. Mr. SECKER, beſides ſharing largely in the common Grief, had peculiar Reaſon to lament an Accident that ſeemed to put an End at once to all his Hopes; but he had taken his Reſolution, and he determined to perſevere. It was ſome Encouragement to him to find that Mr. TALBOT had on his Death-bed recommended him, together with Mr. BENSON and Mr. BUTLER, to his Father's Notice. Thus did that excellent young Man, (for he was but Twenty-nine when he died) by his nice Diſcernment of Characters, and his conſiderate Good-nature, provide moſt effectually in a few ſolemn Moments for the Welfare of that Church from which he himſelf was ſo prematurely ſnatched away; and at the ſame Time raiſed up (when he leaſt thought of it) the trueſt Friend and Protector to his Wife and unborn Daughter; who afterwards found in Mr. SECKER all that tender Care and Aſſiſtance which they could have hoped for from the neareſt Relation.

It being judged neceſſary by Mr. SECKER's

Friends that he ſhould have a Degree at *Oxford*; and he having been informed that if he ſhould previouſly take the Degree of Doctor in Phyſic at *Leyden*, it would probably help him in obtaining the other, he went a little before *Chriſtmas* from *London* to *Rotterdam*, and thence to *Leyden*. He took his Degree there, *March* 7, 1720-1, and, as Part of his Exerciſe for it, compoſed and printed a Diſſertation *de Medicinâ Staticâ*, which is ſtill extant, and is thought, by the Gentlemen of that Profeſſion, a ſenſible and learned Performance. GORTER, in his Treatiſe *de perſpiratione inſenſibili*, printed at *Leyden* in the Year 1736, makes a ſhort but reſpectful Mention of it in his Preface. After paying a Viſit to *Amſterdam* he returned by the Way of *Helvoetſluys* and *Harwich* to *London*, and on the 1ſt of *April*, 1721, entered himſelf a Gentleman-Commoner of *Exeter College* in *Oxford*; about a Twelvemonth after which he obtained the Degree of *Batchelor of Arts* in that *Univerſity*, without any Difficulty, in Conſequence of the Chancellor's recommendatory Letter to the Convocation.

He now ſpent a conſiderable Part of his Time in *London*, where he quickly gained the Eſteem of ſome of the moſt learned and ingenious

ingenious Men of thoſe Days, particularly of Dr. CLARKE, Rector of *St. James*'s, and the celebrated Dean BERKELEY, afterwards Biſhop of *Cloyne*, with whom he every Day became more delighted and more cloſely connected. He paid frequent Viſits of Gratitude and Friendſhip to Mrs. TALBOT, Widow of Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, by whom ſhe had a Daughter five Months after his Deceaſe. With her lived Mrs. CATHARINE BENSON, Siſter to Biſhop BENSON, whom in many Reſpects ſhe greatly reſembled. She had been for ſeveral Years Mrs. TALBOT's inſeparable Companion, and was of unſpeakable Service to her at the Time of her Huſband's Death, by exerting all her Courage, Activity, and good Senſe, (of which ſhe poſſeſſed a large Share) to ſupport her Friend under ſo great an Affliction; and by afterwards attending her ſickly Infant with the utmoſt Care and Tenderneſs, to which, under Providence, was owing the Preſervation of a very valuable Life.

Biſhop TALBOT being in *November* 1721 appointed to the See of *Durham*, Mr. SECKER was in *December* 1722 ordained Deacon by him in *St. James*'s Church, and Prieſt not long after in the ſame Place, where he preached his firſt

firſt Sermon, *March* 28, 1723. The Biſhop's domeſtic Chaplain at that Time was Dr. RUNDLE, a Man of warm Fancy, and very brilliant Converſation, but apt ſometimes to be carried by the Vivacity of his Wit into indiſcreet and ludicrous Expreſſions, which created him Enemies, and on one Occaſion produced diſagreeable Conſequences. With him Mr. SECKER was ſoon after aſſociated in the Biſhop's Family, and both taken down by his Lordſhip to *Durham* in *July* 1723.

On the Death of Sir GEORGE WHELER, in 1723-4, the Biſhop gave his Prebend of *Durham* to Mr. BENSON, and the Rectory of *Houghton le Spring* to Mr. SECKER. This valuable Piece of Preferment putting it in his Power to fix himſelf in the World in a Manner agreeable to his Inclinations, he ſoon after made a Propoſal of Marriage to Mrs. BENSON abovementioned; which being accepted they were married by Biſhop TALBOT in *King-Street* Chapel, *October* 28, 1725. At the earneſt Deſire of both, Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter conſented to live with them, and the two Families from that Time became one.

Not long before this, Biſhop TALBOT had given the Rectory of *Haughton*, near *Darlington*,

ton, to Mr. BUTLER. There was a Neceſſity for rebuilding a great Part of the Parſonage-Houſe, and Mr. BUTLER had neither Money nor Talents for that Work. Mr. SECKER therefore, who had his Friends always in his Thoughts, and was now in great Favour with his Patron, perſuaded him to give Mr. BUTLER, in Exchange for *Haughton*, the Rectory of *Stanhope*, which was of much greater Value, and without any ſuch Incumbrance. In the Winter of 1725-6 Mr. BUTLER publiſhed the firſt Edition of his incomparable Sermons. Mr. SECKER took much Pains to render his Stile more familiar, and his Meaning more obvious. Yet they were at laſt by many called obſcure. But whatever requires Attention is not of Courſe obſcure. No one (as Dr. CLARKE rightly obſerved on this Occaſion) ever imputed Obſcurity to *Euclid*'s *Elements*. Difficulties they may have, but Difficulties ſoon maſtered by the Degree of Attention which ſuch Subjects require.—Mr. SECKER gave his Friend the ſame Aſſiſtance in the Diſcourſe prefixed to the *Second Edition*, and alſo in that noble Work, which he afterwards publiſhed, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Conſtitution and Courſe of Nature.*

He

He now gave up all the Time he poſſibly could to his Reſidence at *Houghton*. He applied himſelf with Alacrity to all the Duties of a Country Clergyman, and ſupported that uſeful and reſpectable Character throughout with the ſtricteſt Propriety. He omitted Nothing which he thought could be of Uſe to the Souls and Bodies of the People entruſted to his Care. He brought down his Converſation and his Sermons to the Level of their Underſtandings; he viſited them in private, he catechiſed the young and ignorant, he received his Country Neighbours and Tenants kindly and hoſpitably, and was of great Service to the poorer Sort of them by his Skill in Phyſic, which was the only Uſe he ever made of it. Though this Place was in a very remote Part of the World, yet the Solitude of it perfectly ſuited his ſtudious Diſpoſition, and the Income ariſing from it bounded his Ambition. Here he would have been content to live and die; here, as he has often been heard to declare, he ſpent ſome of the happieſt Hours of his Life; and it was no Thought or Choice of his own that removed him to a higher and more public Sphere. But Mrs. SECKER's Health, which began now to be very bad, and was thought

to

to have been injured by the Dampneſs of the Situation, obliged him to think of exchanging it for a more healthy one. And Dr. FINNEY, Prebendary of *Durham*, and Rector of *Ryton*, being old and infirm, Mr. BENSON requeſted the Biſhop, through Dr. RUNDLE, that Mr. SECKER might ſucceed him, and reſign *Houghton*. This meeting with Difficulties, Mr. BENSON, in order to remove them, very generouſly gave up his Prebend of *Sarum*, to accommodate the Perſon for whom *Ryton* was deſigned, and then Mr. SECKER was allowed to make the Exchange abovementioned. He went up to *London*, and was inſtituted to *Ryton* and the Prebend, *June* 3, 1727, and for the two following Years lived chiefly at *Durham*, going over every Week to officiate at *Ryton*, and ſpending there two or three Months together in the Summer.

In *July*, 1732, the Duke of *Grafton*, then Lord Chamberlain, appointed him Chaplain to the King. For this Favour he was indebted to Dr. SHERLOCK, who having heard him preach at *Bath*, had conceived the higheſt Opinion of his Abilities, and thought them well worthy of being brought forwards into public Notice. From that Time an Intimacy

macy commenced betwixt them, and he received from that great Prelate many ſolid Proofs of Eſteem and Friendſhip.

His Month of Waiting at *St. James's* happened to be *Auguſt*, and on *Sunday* the 27th of that Month he preached before the Queen, the King being then abroad. A few Days after, her Majeſty ſent for him into her Cloſet, and held a long and gracious Converſation with him. In the Courſe of it he took an Opportunity of mentioning to her his Friend Mr. BUTLER. The Queen ſaid, ſhe thought he had been dead. Mr. SECKER aſſured her he was not. Yet her Majeſty afterwards aſked Archbiſhop BLACKBURNE if he was not dead? His Anſwer was; No, Madam, but he is buried. And indeed the Retirement of *Stanhope*, where he ſpent almoſt his whole Time, was too ſolitary for his Diſpoſition, which had in it a natural Caſt of Gloomineſs. And though theſe recluſe Hours were by no Means loſt either to private Improvement or public Utility, yet he felt at Times, very painfully, the Want of that ſelect Society of Friends, to which he had been accuſtomed, and which could inſpire him with the greateſt Chearfulneſs. Mr. SECKER, who knew this, was extremely anxious to draw

him out into a more active and conſpicuous Scene, and omitted no Opportunity of expreſſing this Deſire to ſuch as he thought capable of promoting it. And not long after this, on Mr. TALBOT's being made Lord Chancellor, he found Means to have Mr. BUTLER recommended to him for his Chaplain. His Lordſhip accepted and ſent for him. This Promotion bringing him back into the World, the Queen very ſoon appointed him her *Clerk of the Cloſet*, from whence he roſe, as his Talents became more known, to thoſe high Dignities which he afterwards enjoyed.

Mr. SECKER now began to have a public Character, and ſtood high in the Eſtimation of thoſe who were allowed to be the beſt Judges of Merit. He had already given Proofs of Abilities that plainly indicated the Eminence to which he muſt one Day riſe, as a Preacher and a Divine; and it was not long before an Opportunity offered of placing him in an advantageous Point of View. Dr. TYRWHIT, who ſucceeded Dr. CLARKE as Rector of *St. James*'s in 1729, found that preaching in ſo large a Church endangered his Health. Biſhop GIBSON therefore, his Father-in-law, propoſed to the Crown that he ſhould be made Reſidentiary

tiary of *St. Paul*'s, and that Mr. SECKER ſhould ſucceed him in the Rectory. This Arrangement was ſo acceptable to thoſe in Power, that it took Place without any Difficulty. Mr. SECKER was inſtituted Rector the 18th of *May*, 1733, and in the Beginning of *July* went to *Oxford* to take his Degree of *Doctor of Laws*, not being of ſufficient Standing for that of *Divinity*. On this Occaſion it was that he preached his celebrated *Act Sermon* on the Advantages and the Duties of academical Education, which was univerſally allowed to be a Maſterpiece of ſound Reaſoning and juſt Compoſition. It was printed at the Deſire of the Heads of Houſes, and quickly paſſed through ſeveral Editions. It is now to be found in the Second Collection of his *Occaſional Sermons*, publiſhed by himſelf in 1766.

He was cenſured in a Paper called *The Weekly Miſcellany* for not quoting Texts of Scripture in this Sermon. The only Notice he took of that Cenſure was by contributing very liberally for many Years towards ſupporting the Author of it.

At the next Waiting, at *Hampton-Court*, the Queen again ſent for him, and ſaid very obliging

ing Things to him of this Sermon. And it was thought that the Reputation he had acquired by it contributed not a little towards that Promotion which very ſoon followed its Publication. For in *December* 1734 he received a very unexpected Notice, by Letter, from Biſhop GIBSON, that the King had fixed on him to be Biſhop of *Briſtol*. Dr. RUNDLE had a little before this been propoſed by the Lord Chancellor TALBOT for the See of *Glouceſter*, but on Account of ſome Imprudences of Speech charged on the Doctor by Mr. VENN, the Biſhop of *London* oppoſed this Nomination, and with much Difficulty prevailed on Dr. BENSON to accept that Dignity. Dr. FLEMING was about the ſame Time promoted to the See of *Carliſle*; and the three new Biſhops were all conſecrated together in *Lambeth Chapel*, *Jan.* 19, 1734-5, the Conſecration Sermon being preached by Dr. THOMAS, now Biſhop of *Wincheſter*.

The Honours to which Dr. SECKER was thus raiſed in the Prime of Life did not in the leaſt abate his Diligence and Attention to Buſineſs; for which indeed there was now more Occaſion than ever. He immediately ſet about the Viſitation of his Dioceſe, confirmed in a

great Number of Places, preached in ſeveral Churches, ſometimes twice a Day, and, from the Informations received in his Progreſs, laid the Foundation of a parochial Account of his Dioceſe, for the Benefit of his Succeſſors. Finding, at the ſame Time, the Affairs of his Pariſh of *St. James's* in great Diſorder, he took the Trouble, in Concert with a few others, to put the Accounts of the ſeveral Officers into a regular Method, drew up a Set of excellent Rules to direct them better for the future, and, by the large Share which he always took in the Management of the Poor, and the Regulation of many other parochial Concerns, was of ſignal Service to his Pariſhioners, even in a temporal View. But it was their ſpiritual Welfare which engaged, as it ought to do, his chief Attention. As far as the Circumſtances of the Times and the Populouſneſs of that polite Part of the Metropolis allowed, he omitted not even thoſe private Admonitions and perſonal Applications which are often attended with the happieſt Effects. Not being able, however, to do ſo much in this Way as he wiſhed, he was peculiarly aſſiduous in giving and promoting every Kind of public Inſtruction. He allowed out of his own Income

a Salary

a Salary for reading early and late Prayers, which had formerly been paid out of the Offertory Money. He held a *Confirmation* once every Year, and examined and inſtructed the Candidates ſeveral Weeks before in the Veſtry, and gave them religious Tracts, which he alſo diſtributed, at other Times, very liberally to thoſe that needed them. He drew up for the Uſe of his Pariſhioners that admirable Courſe of *Lectures on the Church Catechiſm*, which have been lately publiſhed, and not only read them, once every Week on the uſual Days, but alſo every Sunday Evening, either at the Church or one of the Chapels belonging to it. They were received with univerſal Approbation, and attended regularly by Perſons of all Ages and Conditions. The Judgement of the Public has ſince confirmed the Opinion of his Pariſhioners, and eſtabliſhed the Reputation of this Work, as one of the fulleſt, cleareſt, and exacteſt Compendiums of revealed Religion that the Engliſh Language affords.

The Sermons which at the ſame Time he ſet himſelf to compoſe were truly excellent and original. His Faculties were now in their full Vigour, and he had an Audience to ſpeak before that rendered the utmoſt Exertion of

them neceſſary. He did not however ſeek to gratify the higher Part by amuſing them with refined Speculations or ingenious Eſſays, unintelligible to the lower Part, and unprofitable to both; but he laid before them all, with equal Freedom and Plainneſs, the great Chriſtian Duties belonging to their reſpective Stations, and reproved the Follies and Vices of every Rank amongſt them without Diſtinction or Palliation. He ſtudied human Nature thoroughly in all its various Forms, and knew what Sort of Arguments would have moſt Weight with each Claſs of Men. He brought the Subject home to their Boſoms, and did not ſeem to be merely ſaying uſeful Things in their Preſence, but addreſſing himſelf perſonally to every one of them. Few ever poſſeſſed, in a higher Degree, the rare Talent of touching on the moſt delicate Subjects with the niceſt Propriety and Decorum, of ſaying the moſt familiar Things without being low, the plaineſt without being feeble, the boldeſt without giving Offence. He could deſcend with ſuch ſingular Eaſe and Felicity into the minuteſt Concerns of common Life, could lay open, with ſo much Addreſs, the various Workings, Artifices, and Evaſions of the human Mind; that his

Audience often thought their own particular Caſes alluded to, and heard with Surprize their private Sentiments and Feelings, their Ways of reaſoning and Principles of acting, exactly ſtated and deſcribed. His Preaching was, at the ſame Time, highly rational, and truly evangelical. He explained with Perſpicuity, he aſſerted with Dignity, the peculiar characteriſtic Doctrines of the Goſpel. He inculcated the Utility, the Neceſſity of them, not merely as ſpeculative Truths, but as actual Inſtruments of moral Goodneſs, tending to purify the Hearts, and regulate the Lives of Men; and thus, by God's gracious Appointment, as well as by the inſeparable Connection betwixt true Faith and right Practice, leading them to Salvation.

Theſe important Truths he taught with the Authority, the Tenderneſs, the Familiarity, of a Parent inſtructing his Children. Though he neither poſſeſſed nor affected the artificial Eloquence of an Orator who wants only to amuſe or to miſlead, yet he had that of an honeſt Man who wants to convince, of a Chriſtian Preacher who wants to reform and to ſave, thoſe that hear him. Solid Argument, manly Senſe, uſeful Directions, ſhort, nervous,

ſtriking Sentences, awakening Queſtions, frequent and pertinent Applications of Scripture; all theſe following each other in quick Succeſſion, and coming evidently from the Speaker's Heart; enforced by his Elocution, his Figure, his Action, and above all by the correſponding Sanctity of his Example, ſtamped Conviction on the Minds of his Hearers, and ſent them Home with Impreſſions not eaſy to be effaced. It will readily be imagined that with theſe Powers he quickly became one of the moſt admired and popular Preachers of his Time. And though it is not to be expected that his Sermons will now afford the ſame Pleaſure, or produce the ſame Effects, in the Cloſet, that they did from the Pulpit, accompanied as they then were with all the Advantages of his Delivery; yet it will plainly appear, that the Applauſe they met with was founded no leſs on the Matter they contained, than the Manner in which they were ſpoken.

On the Death of Archbiſhop WAKE, Dr. POTTER was appointed to ſucceed him in the See of *Canterbury*, and that of *Oxford* was offered to Dr. SECKER, who at firſt declined it. But at the earneſt Requeſt of Biſhop SHERLOCK, who was deſirous to obtain the Biſhopric of

Briſtol

Briſtol for his Brother-in-law Dr. GOOCH, he was at Length prevailed on to accept the Propoſal, and was confirmed Biſhop of *Oxford* in the Month of *May* 1737. Towards the End of the ſame Year died Queen CAROLINE, and the *Sunday* following Biſhop SECKER preached a Sermon on that Occaſion, at *St. James*'s Church, which the Princeſſes deſired to ſee, and ſhowed it to the King, who read it. It was afterwards publiſhed in the Second Volume of his *Occaſional Sermons*, which appeared in his Life-time.

When the unfortunate Breach happened betwixt the late King and the Prince of *Wales*, his Royal Highneſs having removed to *Norfolk-Houſe*, which is in the Pariſh of *St. James*'s, attended Divine Service conſtantly in that Church. The firſt Time he came there, the Clerk in Orders, Mr. BONNEY, inadvertently begun Prayers with his uſual Sentence of Scripture, *I will ariſe and go to my Father*, &c. This quickly became the Subject of much Converſation; and an Addition was made to it, that the Rector preached on the Fifth Commandment, *Honour thy Father and thy Mother*, &c. which was ſo poſitively aſſerted, that Biſhop SHERLOCK could only defend him, by ſaying

that he muſt certainly have been in a Courſe of Sermons on the Commandments, and therefore could not help preaching upon that particular one in its Turn. But the Truth was, he preached on a quite different Text, *The Lord is good to all*, &c. and the whole Sermon was on that Subject. The Prince was pleaſed to ſhew his Lordſhip ſeveral Marks of Civility and Condeſcenſion. He had the Honour of baptizing all his Highneſs's Children, except two; and though he did not attend his Court, which was forbidden to all thoſe who went to the King's, yet on every proper Occaſion he behaved with all the Submiſſion and Reſpect due to his illuſtrious Rank. In Conſequence of this, his Influence with the Prince being ſuppoſed much greater than it really was, he was ſent, by the King's Direction, with a Meſſage to his Royal Highneſs; which not producing the Effects expected from it, he had the Misfortune to incur his Majeſty's Diſpleaſure; who had been unhappily perſuaded to think that he might have done more with the Prince than he did, though indeed he could not.—For this Reaſon, and becauſe he ſometimes acted with thoſe who oppoſed the Court, the King did not ſpeak to him for a great Number of Years.

In

In *February* 1742-3 a Bill was brought into Parliament to take off the high Duties on ſpirituous Liquors, and to lay on others much lower in their Room. As this Alteration was thought likely to have a moſt pernicious Effect on the Health and Morals of the common People, it met with a vigorous Oppoſition in the Houſe of Lords, eſpecially from the Bench of Biſhops, all of whom voted, and ſeveral ſpoke, againſt it. Amongſt the latter were Biſhop SHERLOCK and Biſhop SECKER: And when it paſſed, the Biſhop of *Oxford* entered his Diſſent. Mr. SANDYS was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and this was conſidered as his Bill; yet ſoon after, on the Death of Biſhop HOUGH, he very generouſly endeavoured, without Dr. SECKER's Knowledge, to obtain for him the See of *Worceſter*. It was in the Courſe of the ſame Year that his Lordſhip received a Letter from Dr. WISHART, Provoſt of *Edinburgh* College, recommending to him his Brother and Mr. WALLACE, Deputies from the eſtabliſhed Clergy of *Scotland*, to promote a Bill in Parliament for providing a Maintenance for their Widows and Children, which many of them imagined the Biſhops would oppoſe. Dr. SECKER paid them all the Civility, and did

did them all the Service he could. None of the Bench oppoſed their Bill either publicly or privately, and it was moved for by a Biſhop at each of its three Readings in the Houſe of Lords.

About the Middle of *October*, in the following Year, died SARAH, Ducheſs Dowager of *Marlborough*. She was buried at *Blenheim*, by Biſhop SECKER, whom ſhe had appointed one of her Executors. For this Choice ſhe could have no other Reaſon than the high Opinion ſhe entertained in common with the reſt of the World, of his Underſtanding and Integrity; for he never paid the leaſt Court to her, either by private Adulation, or by accommodating his public Conduct to her Grace's political Sentiments. On his being made Biſhop of OXFORD, ſhe paid him ſome common Civilities of Neighbourhood, and deſired, by Lord CORNBURY, to ſee him. When he had viſited her a few Times, ſhe requeſted him to be one of her Executors, and read to him the Clauſe in her Will relating to them, in which ſhe had given each of them £.2000, and indemnified them from any Miſtakes which they might honeſtly make. Before he gave his Conſent, he conſulted Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE upon it, who adviſed him

him to accept the Truſt. After this he viſited her Grace occaſionally every Winter. She never aſked him any Queſtions, nor gave him any Hints, about the paſt or future Diſpoſal of his Vote in Parliament. He always ſpoke his Mind to her very freely, how much ſoever it differed from hers, and ſhe bore it, for the moſt Part, patiently. He blamed her for leaving ſo much of her Eſtate to Perſons not related to her, and particularly for giving any Thing to himſelf, who, he told her, was as rich as her Grace. Theſe Remonſtrances ſhe did not ſeem to take well, and never ſaid any Thing more to him about her Will. He therefore concluded that ſhe had ſtruck him out from being one of her Executors, but it proved otherwiſe. She gave each of them an additional £.500. None of her Money ever came into his Lordſhip's Hands to be diſpoſed of by him in her Life-time. But he had good Reaſon to think that ſhe gave away large Sums in Charity, to the Amount of ſeveral Thouſands every Year.

Some Time before this, the Nation began to be alarmed with the Appearances of a Rebellion. About the Middle of *February*, 1743-4, the King ſent a Meſſage to both Houſes of Parliament,

liament, acquainting them, that the Pretender's Son was meditating an Invaſion of this Kingdom from the Coaſt of *France*. The Biſhop of OXFORD took the earlieſt Opportunity, after this Declaration, of ſignalizing his Affection to the Government, and exciting that of others, by compoſing a Sermon on the Occaſion, which he preached at *St. James*'s Church the 26th of the ſame Month. A Motion was ſoon after made in the Houſe of Lords to attaint the Pretender's Son. It met with ſome Oppoſition, but was ſtrenuouſly ſupported by the Friends of the Conſtitution, and amongſt others by Biſhop SECKER, who made a ſpirited extempore Speech in its Favour. When the Rebellion actually broke out in *September*, 1745, he ſent immediately a circular Letter upon it to his Clergy, and drew up and promoted an Addreſs from them to the King. On his Return to *London* in *October*, he preached the abovementioned Sermon again at his Church and both his Chapels, with ſome Alterations and Improvements, and leaving it to be printed, went down to a County Meeting at *Oxford*, and back again in a few Days to *St. James*'s, when he preſented his Sermon to the King. It was much read and admired, and has been ranked, by the beſt

Judges,

Judges, amongſt the Firſt of the many excellent Ones which were publiſhed on that Occaſion. *

In the Spring of the Year 1748 Mrs. SECKER died of the Gout in her Stomach. She was a Woman of great Senſe and Merit, but of a very weak and ſickly Conſtitution. They had been married upwards of twenty Years, during the greateſt Part of which Time, her extreme bad State of Health and Spirits had put his Affection to the ſevereſt Trials; by which, inſtead of being leſſened, it ſeemed to become ſtronger every Day. He attended her in all her long Illneſſes with the greateſt Care and Tenderneſs, and was always ready to break off any Engagement, any Study, provided his Company would procure her a Moment's Eaſe or Chearfulneſs.

Not long after this a Bill came into the Houſe of Lords, and afterwards paſſed into an Act, by which all Letters of Orders to *Scotch* Epiſcopal Miniſters, not granted by a Biſhop of the Church of *England* or *Ireland*, were diſallowed from *Michaelmas*, 1748, whether dated before that Time or after. This the Biſhop of *Ox-*

* It is now in the Volume of Sermons printed by himſelf when Biſhop of Oxford, in 1758.

ford

ford thought a great Hardſhip, and ſpoke largely againſt it in the Houſe. He was anſwered, but with much Civility and Reſpect, by Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE, who favoured the Bill. In the Committee however the Majority were againſt it, of which all the Biſhops preſent made Part. Biſhop THOMAS, of *Lincoln*, alſo ſpoke againſt it upon the Report. But there they were outvoted. Dr. WISHART, the Provoſt of *Edinburgh* College, told his Lordſhip afterwards, that he thought the Bill was too hard on the Epiſcopal Miniſters, and that the Biſhops had done right.

The Part which Dr. SECKER took in this Affair did him not the leaſt Diſſervice with his Friend the Lord Chancellor, whoſe Sentiments he oppoſed; and who a little before had made a Propoſal to him, that if the Deanery of *St. Paul*'s became vacant, he ſhould take it in Exchange for the Rectory of *St. James*'s, and the Prebend of *Durham*. The Biſhop accepted the Offer, but told his Lordſhip he ſhould not remind him of it, which he never did. Notwithſtanding that, about two Years afterwards, on the Nomination of Dr. BUTLER, Dean of *St. Paul*'s, to the See of *Durham*, Lord HARDWICKE immediately wrote to the Duke of *New-*

Newcaſtle, who was then at *Hanover* with the King, recommending the Biſhop of *Oxford* for the Deanery. His Majeſty conſented, and he was inſtalled in *December*, 1750.

It was no Wonder that after preſiding over ſo extenſive and populous a Pariſh for upwards of Seventeen Years, Biſhop SECKER ſhould willingly conſent to be releaſed from a Burthen, which began now to grow too great for his Strength. Some of his Pariſhioners too had requited him but ill for the Pains he ſincerely took to ſerve them in all Reſpects. But far the largeſt and moſt creditable Part of them were duly ſenſible of what they owed to him; and moſt deeply regretted the Loſs of a Paſtor, whoſe Character they reverenced, and by whoſe Labours and Inſtructions they had ſo greatly profited. When he preached his Farewell Sermon, the whole Audience melted into Tears. He was followed with the Prayers and good Wiſhes of thoſe whom every honeſt Man would be moſt ambitious to pleaſe; and there are Numbers ſtill living, who retain a ſtrong and grateful Remembrance of his inceſſant and tender Solicitude for their Welfare.

Having now more Leiſure both to proſecute his own Studies, and to encourage thoſe of

others, he gave Dr. CHURCH conſiderable Aſſiſtance, in his *firſt and ſecond Vindication of the miraculous Powers*, &c. againſt Dr. MIDDLETON, which were publiſhed in the Years 1750 and 1751; and he was of equal Uſe to him in his *Analyſis of Lord* BOLINGBROKE's *Works*, which appeared a few Years afterwards. About the ſame Time began the late Archdeacon SHARP's Controverſy with the Followers of Mr. HUTCHINSON, which was carried on to the End of the Year 1755. The Subjects of it were, the Meaning of the Words *Elohim* and *Berith*, the Antiquity of the *Hebrew* Language and Character, the Expoſition of the Word *Cherubim*. Theſe Pieces made together three Volumes in Octavo. Biſhop SECKER read over all Dr. SHARP's Papers before they went to the Preſs, and corrected and improved them throughout.

But the Eaſe which this late Change of Situation gave him was very ſoon diſturbed by a heavy and unexpected Stroke, the Loſs of his three Friends, Biſhops BUTLER, BENSON, and BERKELEY, who were all cut off within the Space of one Year. Of theſe eminent Men who were thus joined in Death, as they had been throughout Life, and with whom Biſhop SECKER was moſt intimately connected from his

his earlieſt Years, two are ſo well known to the World by their immortal Writings, and the juſt Applauſe of contemporary Authors, that they need no other Memorial. But the Name of BENSON, being written only on the Hearts of thoſe that knew him, deſerves ſome further Notice in this Place.

* He was educated at the *Charter-houſe*, and removed from thence to *Chriſt Church* in *Oxford*, where he had ſeveral noble Pupils, whoſe Friendſhip and Veneration for him continued to the End of Life. His favourite Study in early Years was the *Mathematics*, in which he was well ſkilled, and had alſo an excellent Taſte for *Painting*, *Architecture*, and the other fine Arts. He accompanied the late Earl of POMFRET in his Travels, and in *Italy* became acquainted with Mr. BERKELEY, as he did at *Paris* with Mr. SECKER. He was, from his Youth to his lateſt Age, the Delight of all who knew him. His Manner and Behaviour were the Reſult of great natural Humanity, poliſhed by a thorough Knowledge of the World, and the moſt perfect good Breeding, mixed with a Dignity, which, on Occaſions that called for it, no one

* This Account of Biſhop BENSON is given in the Words of a Perſon who knew him well, and to whom this Narrative is indebted for a few other Communications of the ſame Nature.

more properly ſupported. His Piety, though awefully ſtrict, was inexpreſſibly amiable. It diffuſed ſuch a Sweetneſs through his Temper, and ſuch a Benevolence over his Countenance, as none who were acquainted with him can ever forget. Bad Nerves, bad Health, and naturally bad Spirits were ſo totally ſubdued by it, that he not only ſeemed, but in Reality was, the happieſt of Men. He looked upon all that the World calls important, its Pleaſures, its Riches, its various Competitions, with a playful and good-humoured Kind of Contempt; and could make Perſons aſhamed of their Follies, by a Raillery that never gave Pain to any human Being. Of Vice he always ſpoke with Severity and Deteſtation, but looked on the vicious with the Tenderneſs of a pitying Angel. His Turn was highly ſociable, and his Acquaintance very extenſive. Wherever he went, he carried Chearfulneſs and Improvement along with him. As Nothing but the Intereſts of Chriſtianity and Virtue ſeemed conſiderable enough to give him any laſting Anxiety; ſo, on the other Hand, there was no Incident ſo trifling from which he could not raiſe Amuſement and Mirth.

It was much againſt his Will that he was appointed

appointed Biſhop of *Glouceſter*, and from that See he would never remove. He was however a vigilant and active Prelate. He revived the very uſeful Inſtitution of rural Deans, he augmented ſeveral Livings, he beautified the Church, and greatly improved the Palace. It was an Act of Kindneſs to his Friend which coſt him his Life. At the Requeſt of Dr. SECKER he went from *Glouceſter* to *Bath* to viſit Biſhop BUTLER, who lay ill at that Place, and he found him almoſt at the Point of Death. After one Day's Stay there, he was obliged to go to the northern Extremity of his Dioceſe, to confirm. The Fatigue of theſe Journies, (for, according to his conſtant Practice, he travelled on Horſeback) and his Buſineſs together, produced an Inflammation, and that a Mortification, in his Bowels, of which he died. The Biſhop of *Oxford* was appointed one of his Executors, with a Legacy of £. 300. which he refuſed to take.

In the Beginning of the Year 1753, a Bill for the Naturalization of the *Jews*, commonly called the *Jew Bill*, had paſſed both Houſes of Parliament with little or no Oppoſition. But a great Clamour being raiſed againſt it without Doors, it was thought adviſeable that

the Duke of *Newcaſtle* ſhould move for the Repeal of it, on the firſt Day of the Seſſion in the next Winter. And he deſiring to be ſeconded by a Biſhop, Dr. SECKER was fixed on for that Purpoſe. He accordingly roſe up after the Duke, and made a Speech, which had the good Fortune to be remarkably well received; though Lord *Weſtmoreland* ſaid, that for ſome Time he thought the Biſhop had been ſpeaking againſt the Repeal, having advanced more in Favour of the Bill than he had ever heard before. He ſpoke afterwards for a Clauſe to diſable *Jews* from being Patrons of Livings, which ſome thought they might; but the Deſire of the Houſe for the ſimple Repeal prevailed, and he was adviſed not to divide it on the Clauſe. On this Occaſion it was that he vindicated his Friend Dr. SHERLOCK, with great Spirit, againſt ſome ſevere Attacks made upon him by a noble Lord in Relation to this Bill; for which generous Proceeding he had the Biſhop's Thanks.

During the whole Time that he was Dean of *St. Paul*'s, he attended Divine Service conſtantly in that Cathedral twice every Day, whether in Reſidence or not; and, in Concert with the other three Reſidentiaries, eſtabliſhed the Cuſ-

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tom of always preaching their own Turns in the Afternoon, or exchanging with each other only; which, excepting the Caſe of Illneſs, or extraordinary Accidents, was very punctually obſerved. The Fund, appropriated to the Repairs of the Church, having by Neglect and wrong Management fallen into much Confuſion, he took great Pains in examining the Accounts, reducing Payments, making a proper Diviſion of Expence betwixt the Dean and Chapter on one Side, and the three Truſtees on the other, and prevailing on the latter to agree to that Diviſion; by which Means the Fund was put on ſuch a Footing, that it encreaſed afterwards conſiderably, and promiſed to be ſufficient for the Purpoſes it was deſigned to anſwer. In the following Year he was engaged in another very troubleſome Tranſaction, making an Agreement with the Inhabitants of *St. Faith's* Pariſh, concerning their Share of *St. Paul's* Church-yard. And he left behind him a great Number of Papers relative to both theſe Points. He procured the old Writings of the Church to be put in Order, and an Index made to them. He collated a Copy of the old Statute-Book, as it is called, with that which is uſed as the Original, and corrected a Multitude of Miſtakes in that

Tranſcript. He examined alſo the Regiſters and Books in the Chapter-Houſe, extracted out of them what ſeemed material, and left the Extracts in the Hands of his Succeſſor.

In the Summer Months he reſided conſtantly at his Epiſcopal Houſe at *Cuddeſden*. The Vicinity of that Place to the Univerſity of *Oxford*, and the natural Connection which his Station gave him with the Members of that learned Body, could not but be very pleaſing to a Man of his literary Turn. Yet his Situation, agreeable and honourable as it was to him, had notwithſtanding its Difficulties. To appear with any conſiderable Degree of Credit amongſt ſo many Men of the firſt Eminence for Genius and Erudition, and to preſerve the Reverence due to the Character of a Dioceſan, amidſt ſuch violent Party-diſſenſions as at that Time unhappily prevailed there, required no ſmall Share of Ability and Prudence. Dr. SECKER however had the good Fortune to ſucceed in both thoſe Points. His Houſe was the Reſort of thoſe who were moſt diſtinguiſhed for academical Merit, and his Converſation ſuch as was worthy of his Gueſts, who always left him with a high Eſteem of his Underſtanding and Learning. And though in the warm Con-

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teſt in 1754, for Repreſentatives of the County, (in which it was ſcarce poſſible for any Perſon of Eminence to remain neuter) he openly eſpouſed that Side which was thought moſt favourable to the Principles of the Revolution; yet it was without Bitterneſs or Vehemence, without ever departing from the Decency of his Profeſſion, the Dignity of his Station, or the Charity preſcribed by his Religion. On the contrary, along with the trueſt Affection to the Government, (though he was then under the Diſpleaſure of the Court) he preſerved at the ſame Time ſo much good Temper and good Will towards the oppoſite Party; took ſuch unwearied Pains to ſoften the violent Prejudices conceived againſt them by the Adminiſtration; and ſhewed on all proper Occaſions ſo cordial and friendly a Concern for the Welfare and Honour of the whole Univerſity; that they, who moſt diſliked his political Tenets, could not help acknowledging his Candour and Moderation. The ſame prudent Conduct in this Reſpect which he obſerved himſelf, he recommended to his Clergy in that memorable Paſſage towards the Concluſion of his fifth Charge, * which ſtruck the Hearers by its Novelty and

* Page 197

Propriety at the Time in a very remarkable Manner, and is well worthy the ſerious Peruſal of all who happen to be in ſimilar Circumſtances. Indeed the whole Series of thoſe excellent Charges, which he delivered in the Courſe of his governing that Dioceſe, were liſtened to by a very learned and critical Audience with peculiar Marks of Attention and Regard. The firſt of them, which contains Directions for regulating the Studies, the Temper, and general Conduct of the Clergy, was printed ſoon after it was ſpoken, and paſſed through ſeveral Editions. Having in this conſidered them as Miniſters of the Goſpel at large, in his ſubſequent ones he proceeded to conſider them as Miniſters of the ſeveral Pariſhes in which they officiated; and deſcended to more particular Directions, both with Regard to the Diſcharge of their ſpiritual Functions, and alſo the Care of their Temporalties, their Incomes, Churches, Lands, and Houſes.

But Words were not the only Perſuaſives he made uſe of. He enjoined no Duty, he impoſed no Burthen on thoſe under his Juriſdiction, which he had not formerly undergone, or was not ſtill ready, as far as it became him, to undergo. He preached conſtantly in his Church

Church at *Cuddeſden* every *Sunday* Morning, and read a Lecture on the Catechiſm in the Evening; (both which he continued to do in *Lambeth* Chapel after he became Archbiſhop;) and in every other Reſpect, within his own proper Department, was himſelf that devout, diſcreet, diſintereſted, laborious, conſcientious Paſtor, which he wiſhed and exhorted every Clergyman in his Dioceſe to become.

A Conduct like this could not fail of attracting the Notice and Eſteem of all thoſe who wiſhed well to the Cauſe of Learning and Religion, in whoſe Thoughts he had been long marked out for the higheſt Honours of his Profeſſion. He continued notwithſtanding in the See of *Oxford* upwards of twenty Years; going on that whole Time in the ſame even Courſe of Duty, and enjoying with the higheſt Reliſh thoſe leiſure Hours, which his Retirement at *Cuddeſden* ſometimes afforded him, for the Proſecution of his favourite Studies. At Length however his diſtinguiſhed Merit prevailed over all the political Obſtacles to his Advancement; and placed him, without any Effort or Application of his own, in that important Station which he had ſhewn himſelf ſo well qualified to adorn. For within a very

few

few Days after the Death of Archbiſhop HUTTON, he received a Meſſage from the Duke of *Newcaſtle*, acquainting him that his Grace had propoſed him to the King for the vacant See of *Canterbury*. He returned the Duke a ſhort Note of Thanks, expreſſing at the ſame Time his Wiſhes that his Majeſty might fix on a properer Perſon. Soon after this his Grace deſired an Interview with the Biſhop, at which he informed his Lordſhip that the King had appointed him Archbiſhop. This Promotion accordingly took Place, and he was confirmed at *Bow-Church*, *April* 21, 1758.

In accepting this high and burthenſome Station Dr. SECKER acted on that Principle which influenced him through Life; he ſacrificed his own Eaſe and Comfort to Conſiderations of public Utility. Apart from this, the mere ſecular Advantages of Grandeur were Objects below his Ambition; were, as he knew and felt, but poor Compenſations for the Anxiety and Difficulties attending them. His Idea of theſe Things was always the ſame with that which is expreſſed in his intended Speech to the Convocation of 1761; "Non ſunt, experto credite, non ſunt tanti vel "honores vel reditus ampliſſimi Eccleſiaſticis "deſtinati, ut a quopiam enixè cupiantur.

"Multum

" Multum habent ſolicitudinis, non parum " forſan invidiæ, veræ delectationis nihil, niſi " quoties occurrit, occurrit autem raro, inſig- " nis benefaciendi occaſio †." Theſe were not mere Words of Courſe; they were the genuine Sentiments of his Heart; his whole Conduct bore Teſtimony to the Sincerity with which he ſpoke. He had never once through his whole Life aſked Preferment for himſelf, nor ſhewn any unbecoming Eagerneſs for it; and the Uſe he made of his newly acquired Dignity very clearly ſhewed, that Rank, and Wealth, and Power had in no other Light any Charms for him, than as they enlarged the Sphere of his active and induſtrious Benevolence.

The firſt Thing that engaged his Attention was the Care of his new Dioceſe, which he immediately viſited. And finding that partly the real, and partly the preſumed, Unwholeſomeneſs of ſome Parts of it had deterred too many from living on their Benefices, he made this the firſt Article of his Charge, and preſſed the Neceſſity of Reſidence upon his Clergy, in the ſtrongeſt, yet moſt affectionate Terms ‡.

† Oratio Synodalis, P. 368, 369.
‡ Firſt Charge to the Dioceſe of *Canterbury*, p. 207—219.

But

But whenever particular Circumſtances rendered the perſonal Preſence of the Miniſter himſelf clearly impracticable, he then earneſtly recommended peculiar Care in the Choice of a Subſtitute; and ſo much Tenderneſs and Liberality in the Proviſion made for him as might be ſome Compenſation for the Unhealthineſs or Diſagreeableneſs of his Situation *. Yet as this would, he knew, bear hard on ſome Incumbents, whoſe ſmall Preferments, or narrow Circumſtances, or numerous Families obliged them to obtain Help on as eaſy Terms as they well could; in ſuch Caſes he frequently made an Addition himſelf to the Curate's Salary, and, as a ſtill further Encouragement, rewarded occaſionally with Preferment, thoſe who had reſided long upon their Cures, and performed their Duty well; eſpecially in unwholeſome Places.

In little more than two Years after his Grace's Promotion to the See of *Canterbury*, died the late King GEORGE the Second. Of what paſſed on that Occaſion, and of the Form obſerved in proclaiming our preſent moſt gracious Sovereign, (in which the Archbiſhop of Courſe

* Firſt Charge to the Dioceſe of *Canterbury*, P. 219—222.

took the Lead) his Grace has left an Account in Writing. He did the ſame with regard to the ſubſequent Ceremonials of marrying and crowning their preſent Majeſties, which in Conſequence of his Station he had the Honour to ſolemnize, and in which he found a great Want of proper Precedents and Directions. He had before, when Rector of *St. James*'s, baptized the new King, (who was born in that Pariſh) and he was afterwards called upon to perform the ſame Office for the greateſt Part of his Majeſty's Children;—a remarkable, and perhaps unexampled, Concurrence of ſuch Incidents in the Life of one Man.

From the Time that he was made Dean of *St. Paul*'s, his late Majeſty uſed to ſpeak to him at his Levee occaſionally, but with no particular Marks of Diſtinction. But after he became Archbiſhop, the King treated him with much Kindneſs, and on one Occaſion was pleaſed to aſſure him very particularly, that he was perfectly ſatisfied with the Whole of his Conduct in that Station. And ſurely his Majeſty, as well as all his People, had good Reaſon to be ſo. For never did any one ſupport the Rank, or diſcharge the various Duties, of a Metropolitan, with more true Dignity, Wiſdom,

and

and Moderation, than Archbiſhop SECKER *. He conſidered himſelf as the natural Guardian, not only of that Church, over which he preſided, but of Learning, Virtue, and Religion at large; and, from the Eminence on which he was placed, looked round with a watchful Eye on every Thing that concerned them, embracing readily all fit Opportunities to promote their Intereſts, and oppoſing, as far as he was able, all Attempts to injure them.

Men of real Genius or extenſive Knowledge, he ſought out and encouraged. Even thoſe of humbler Talents, provided their Induſtry was great, and their Intentions good, he treated with Kindneſs and Condeſcenſion. Both Sorts he would frequently employ in Undertakings ſuited to their reſpective Abilities, and rewarded them in Ways ſuited to their reſpective Wants. He aſſiſted them with Books, promoted Sub-

* Ecquâ vero in parte ſpem noſtram fefellit? imo vero exſuperavit. Sine offenſione partium, ſine invidiâ, ſine ambitione, eccleſiæ principatum adeptus, ſine arrogantiâ cum dignitate verâ ſuſtinuit; magni vir animi, & verè ἀρχικος, qui politiam eccleſiaſticam animo complectebatur, conſilio dirigebat, auctoritate tuebatur, exemplo ornabat; in negotiis impiger & indefeſſus, nihil a ſe alienum putabat quod ad clericorum jura, mores, famamque pertinebat; auctoritate ita uſus ut nihil pro libidine aut inſolentiâ imperii affectaret, ſed omnia ad οἰκοδομην communeſque eccleſiæ utilitates referret. *Johannis Burton ad amicum epiſtola*, P. 14. Printed at *Oxford*, in 1768, and ſold by RIVINGTON.

ſcriptions

ſcriptions to their Works, contributed largely to them himſelf, talked with them on their private Concerns, entered warmly into their Intereſts, uſed his Credit for them with the Great, gave them Preferments of his own. He expended upwards of £.300. in arranging and improving the Manuſcript Library at *Lambeth*. And having obſerved with Concern, that the Library of printed Books in that Palace had received no Acceſſions ſince the Time of Archbiſhop TENNISON, he made it his Buſineſs to collect Books in all Languages from moſt Parts of *Europe* at a very great Expence, with a View of ſupplying that Chaſm; which he accordingly did, by leaving them to the Library at his Death, and thereby rendered that Collection one of the nobleſt and moſt uſeful in the Kingdom.

All Deſigns and Inſtitutions that tended to advance good Morals and true Religion he patronized with Zeal and Generoſity. He contributed largely to the Maintenance of Schools for the Poor, to rebuilding or repairing Parſonage Houſes and Places of Worſhip, and gave at one Time no leſs than £.500 towards erecting a Chapel in the Pariſh of *Lambeth*, to which he afterwards added near £.100 more. To the Society for promoting Chriſ-

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tian Knowledge he was a liberal Benefactor; and to that for propagating the Goſpel in Foreign Parts, of which he was the Preſident, he paid much Attention; was conſtant at all the Meetings of its Members, (even ſometimes when his Health would but ill permit it) and ſuperintended their Deliberations with conſummate Prudence and Temper. He was ſincerely deſirous to improve to the utmoſt that excellent Inſtitution, and to diffuſe the Knowledge and Belief of Chriſtianity as wide as the Revenues of the Society, and the extreme Difficulty of eſtabliſhing Schools and Miſſions amongſt the *Indians*, and of making any effectual and durable Impreſſions of Religion on their uncivilized Minds, would admit. But Dr. MAYHEW, of *Boſton* in *New-England*, having in an angry Pamphlet accuſed the Society of not ſufficiently anſwering theſe good Purpoſes, and of departing widely from the Spirit of their Charter; with many injurious Reflections interſperſed on the Church of *England*, and the Deſign of appointing Biſhops in *America*; his Grace on all theſe Accounts thought himſelf called upon to confute his Invectives, which he did in a ſhort anonymous Piece, entitled, *An Anſwer to Dr.* MAYHEW's *Obſer-*

Obſervations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for propagating the Goſpel; printed for RIVINGTON in 1764, and reprinted in *America*. The Strength of Argument, as well as Fairneſs and good Temper, with which this Anſwer was written, had a conſiderable Effect on all impartial Men, and even on the Doctor himſelf, who plainly perceived that he had no common Adverſary to deal with; and could not help acknowledging him to be "a Perſon "of excellent Senſe, and a happy Talent at "writing; apparently free from the ſordid "illiberal Spirit of Bigotry; one of a cool "Temper, who often ſhewed much Candour, "was well acquainted with the Affairs of the "Society, and in general a fair Reaſoner*." He was therefore ſo far wrought upon by his "worthy Anſwerer †," as to abate much in his Reply of his former Warmth and Acrimony. But as he ſtill would not allow himſelf to be "wrong in any material Point, ‡" nor forbear giving Way too much to reproachful Language and ludicrous Repreſentations, he was again animadverted upon by Mr. APTHORPE, in a ſenſible Tract, entitled, *A Review of Dr.*

* MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Tract, *&c.* P. 3.
† Ibid. P. 85. ‡ Ibid. P. 87.

MAYHEW's *Remarks*, &c. printed alſo for RIVINGTON, in 1765. This put an End to the Diſpute. The Doctor on reading it declared he ſhould not anſwer it, and the following Year he died.

It appeared evidently in the Courſe of this Controverſy, that Dr. MAYHEW, and probably many other worthy Men amongſt the *Diſſenters* both at home and abroad, had conceived very unreaſonable and groundleſs Jealouſies of the Church of *England*, and its Governors; and had in particular greatly miſunderſtood the Propoſal for appointing Biſhops in ſome of the Colonies. The chief Reaſons for deſiring an Eſtabliſhment of this Nature, were, the Want of Perſons veſted with proper Authority, to adminiſter to the Members of the Church of *England* the antient and uſeful Office of Confirmation; to ſuperintend the Conduct of the epiſcopal Clergy; and to ſave Candidates for the Miniſtry the Trouble, Coſt, and Hazard of coming to *England* for Ordination. It was alledged, that the Expence of croſſing the *Atlantic* for that Purpoſe could not be leſs than £. 100. that near a fifth Part of thoſe who took that Voyage had actually loſt their Lives; and that, in Conſequence of theſe Diſcouragements,

ments, one Half of the Churches in ſeveral Provinces were deſtitute of Clergymen. Common Humanity, as well as common Juſtice, pleaded ſtrongly for a Remedy to theſe Evils; and there appeared to be no other effectual Remedy but the Appointment of one or more Biſhops in ſome of the epiſcopal Colonies. The Dangers and Inconveniences, which the *Diſſenters* ſeemed to apprehend from that Meaſure, were thought to be effectually guarded againſt by the Mode of Appointment which was propoſed. What that Mode was, may be ſeen in the following Extract from the Archbiſhop's Anſwer to Dr. MAYHEW, in which he explains conciſely and clearly the only Plan for ſuch an Eſtabliſhment that was ever meant to be carried into Execution.

" The Church of *England* is, in its Con-
" ſtitution, epiſcopal. It is, in ſome of
" the Plantations, confeſſedly the eſtabliſhed
" Church: in the reſt are many Congrega-
" tions adhering to it; and through the late
" Extenſion of the *Britiſh* Dominions, it is
" likely that there will be more. All Members
" of every Church are, according to the Prin-
" ciples of Liberty, entitled to every Part of
" what they conceive to be the Benefits of it,

" entire and complete, ſo far as conſiſts with the
" Welfare of civil Government. Yet the Mem-
" bers of our Church in *America* do not thus
" enjoy its Benefits, having no Proteſtant Bi-
" ſhop within three thouſand Miles of them;
" a Caſe which never had its Parallel before
" in the Chriſtian World. Therefore it is
" deſired that two or more Biſhops may be
" appointed for them, to reſide where his Ma-
" jeſty ſhall think moſt convenient; that they
" may have no Concern in the leaſt with any
" Perſons who do not profeſs themſelves to be
" of the Church of *England*, but may ordain
" Miniſters for ſuch as do; may confirm their
" Children when brought to them at a fit Age
" for that Purpoſe; and take ſuch Overſight of
" the epiſcopal Clergy, as the Biſhop of *Lon-*
" *don*'s Commiſſaries in thoſe Parts have been
" empowered to take, and have taken without
" Offence. But it is not deſired in the leaſt
" that they ſhould hold Courts to try matri-
" monial or teſtamentary Cauſes; or be veſted
" with any Authority now exerciſed, either by
" provincial Governors, or ſubordinate Magiſ-
" trates; or infringe or diminiſh any Privi-
" leges and Liberties, enjoyed by any of the
" Laity, even of our own Communion. This

" is

" is the real and the only Scheme that hath " been planned for Biſhops in *America*; and " whoever hath heard of any other, hath been " miſinformed through Miſtake or Deſign *." And as to the Place of their Reſidence, his Grace further declares, " that it neither is, nor " ever was intended or deſired to fix one in " *New-England*; but epiſcopal Colonies have " always been propoſed †".

The Doctor on reading this Account confeſſed ‡, that if it were the true one, " he had " been miſinformed himſelf, and knew of others " who had been ſo in common with him; and " that if ſuch a Scheme as this were carried into " Execution, and only ſuch Conſequences were " to follow, as the Propoſer had profeſſedly in " View, he could not object againſt it, except " on the ſame Principle that he ſhould object " againſt the Church of *England* in general §."

As it came however from an unknown Writer, he thought himſelf at Liberty to conſider it as Nothing more than the imaginary Scheme of a private Man, till it was confirmed by better Authority ‖. It now appears to have come from the beſt Authority, and it is certain that this

* Anſwer to MAYHEW, P. 59. † Ib. 66. ‡ *Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 59. § Ib. P. 79. ‖ Ib. P. 61.

Mode of establishing Bishops in *America*, was not invented merely "to serve a present Turn §", being precisely the same with that proposed by Bishop BUTLER twenty Years ago *; and with that mentioned by his Grace, in his *Letter to the Right honourable* HORATIO WALPOLE Esquire, written when he was Bishop of *Oxford*, and published since his Death † by his Executors, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, and Dr. DANIEL BURTON; in which the whole Affair is set in a right Point of View, his own Sentiments upon it more fully explained, and an Answer given to the chief Objections against such a Proposal.

It is not necessary to enter here into the Merits of this Question. It is before the Public, and every one is enabled to judge for himself. But thus much, it is presumed, may safely be inferred from the Account here given of it; (which is the true one;) that the mere Proposal of such an Appointment, or rather the Encouragement of what had been long before proposed, is not a Crime of quite so unpardonable a Nature, as the Archbishop's Adversaries have been pleased to represent it. Posterity will

§ *Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 61.
* See APTHORPE's *Review of* Dr. MAYHEW's *Remarks*, P. 55.
† In the Year 1769; and sold by RIVINGTON.

stand

ſtand amazed, when they are told, that on this Account his Memory has been purſued in Pamphlets and News-papers with ſuch unrelenting Rancour, ſuch unexampled Wantonneſs of Abuſe, as he would ſcarce have deſerved, had he attempted to eradicate *Chriſtianity* out of *America*, and to introduce *Mahometaniſm* in its Room: whereas, the plain Truth is, that all he wiſhed for, was Nothing more than what the very beſt Friends to religious Freedom ever have wiſhed for, a complete Toleration for the Church of *England* in that Country. What an Idea muſt it give Mankind of his Grace's Character to have ſuch a Circumſtance ſingled out by his bittereſt Revilers as the moſt exceptionable Part of it!

But though the Archbiſhop was a ſincere and avowed Friend to that Meaſure, yet it was by no Means the only or the principal Object of his Concern in Regard to the Colonies. The Advancement of true Piety and Learning, the Converſion of the *Indians* and *Negroes*, as far as it was practicable, the Eſtabliſhment of proper Schools, the Diſtribution of uſeful Books, the good Conduct of the Miſſionaries, the Preſervation of Peace and Harmony amongſt the different religious Communities in thoſe

Parts of the *Britiſh* Empire; theſe Things had a very large Share in his Thoughts, and in the Correſpondence which he conſtantly kept up with a few of the ableſt and worthieſt Men in the *American* Provinces. The Letters which he wrote to them, on theſe and ſuch like Subjects, are highly expreſſive of his paſtoral Character; and repreſent in a very pleaſing Light his truly benevolent Diſpoſition, his Condeſcenſion to Perſons of the loweſt Station, his indefatigable Application to every Affair that came before him, his Zeal to promote the Intereſts of Religion in general, and the Church of *England* in particular; not by warm and violent Counſels, but by Methods of Tenderneſs and brotherly Kindneſs towards thoſe who embraced a different Intereſt. Of theſe Things the *Americans* will ever retain a grateful Remembrance; and have, in their Letters to this Country, expreſſed their Senſe of his kind Attention to them in the ſtrongeſt and moſt affectionate Terms.

Whenever any Publications came to his Knowledge that were manifeſtly calculated to corrupt good Morals, or ſubvert the Foundations of Chriſtianity, he did his utmoſt to ſtop the Circulation of them: yet the wretched

Authors

Authors themſelves he was ſo far from wiſhing to treat with any undue Rigour, that he has more than once extended his Bounty to them in Diſtreſs. And when their Writings could not properly be ſuppreſſed (as was too often the Caſe) by lawful Authority, he engaged Men of Abilities to anſwer them, and rewarded them for their Trouble. His Attention was every where. Even the Falſhoods and Miſrepreſentations of Writers in the News-Papers on religious or eccleſiaſtical Subjects, he generally took Care to have contradicted; and when they ſeemed likely to injure in any material Degree the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion, or the Reputation of eminent and worthy Men, he would ſometimes take the Trouble of anſwering them himſelf. One Inſtance of this Kind, which does him Honour, and deſerves Mention, was his Defence of Biſhop BUTLER, who, in a Pamphlet, publiſhed in the Year 1767, was accuſed of having died a Papiſt. This ſtrange Slander, founded on the weakeſt Pretences and moſt trivial Circumſtances that can be imagined, no one was better qualified to confute than the Archbiſhop; as well from his long and intimate Knowledge of Biſhop BUTLER, as from the Information given him

at

at the Time by those who attended his Lordship in his last Illness, and were with him when he died. Accordingly, by an Article in a News-Paper, signed *Misopseudes*, his Grace challenged the Author of that Pamphlet to produce his Authority for what he had advanced; and in a second Article defended the Bishop against him; and in a third (all with the same Signature) confuted another Writer, who, under the Name of *A real Protestant*, still maintained that ridiculous Calumny. His Antagonists were effectually subdued, and his Superiority to them was publicly acknowledged by a sensible and candid Man, who signed himself, and who really was, *A dissenting Minister*. Surely, it is a very unwise Piece of Policy, in those who profess themselves Enemies to Popery, to take so much Pains to bring the most respectable Names within its Pale; and to give it the Merit of having gained over those who were the brightest Ornaments and firmest Supports of the Protestant Cause.

The Welfare, the Credit, the good Influence of the Clergy he had entirely at Heart, and suffered Nothing to escape his Notice, that could in any proper Way promote them. He earnestly endeavoured to prevent unworthy Men from

from bringing Diſgrace on the Profeſſion and Contempt on Religion, by entering into Orders. With this View it was that he ſo ſtrongly recommended the greateſt Care and Caution in ſigning Teſtimonials. "They are," ſays he *, "the only ordinary Information that we have "in a Caſe of the utmoſt Importance, where "we have a Right to be informed. For no "one can imagine, that we are to ordain whoever comes, or depend on clandeſtine Intelligence. We muſt therefore, and do depend on regular Teſtimonials,—every Part "of which ought to be conſidered before it "is given, and no Conſideration paid to Neighbourhood, Acquaintance, Friendſhip, Compaſſion, Importunity, when they ſtand in "Competition with Truth. It may be ſometimes hard for you to refuſe your Hand to improper Perſons; but it is only one of the many "Hardſhips which Conſcience bids Men undergo reſolutely when they are called to them. "It would be much harder, that your Biſhop "ſhould be miſled, the Church of God injured, "and the poor Wretch himſelf aſſiſted to invade ſacrilegiouſly an Office, at the Thought

* Firſt Charge to the Dioceſe of *Canterbury*, P. 222.

"of

" of which he hath Cauſe to tremble ‡." If any ſuch however had unhappily found Means to obtain Ordination, he did his utmoſt to prevent their further Progreſs; or if that could not be done, very openly ſignified his Diſlike of their Conduct; nor could he ever bring himſelf to treat them, however conſiderable their Rank might be, with any Marks of Eſteem or Reſpect.

Men of Worth and Eminence in the Church he cheriſhed and befriended, and endeavoured to bring forward into Stations where they might be ſingularly uſeful. Above all he diſtinguiſhed, with peculiar Marks of his Favour, the conſcientious and diligent Pariſh Prieſt. He was of Opinion, that " the main Support of Piety " and Morals conſiſted in the parochial Labours " of the Clergy; and that, if this Country could " be preſerved from utter Profligateneſs and " Ruin, it muſt be by their Means †." For their Aſſiſtance therefore in one important Branch of their Duty, he gave them in his third archiepiſcopal Charge Directions for writing and ſpeaking Sermons. The Thoughts of ſuch a Man, on ſo nice and difficult a Subject,

‡ Firſt Charge to the Dioceſe of *Canterbury*, P. 226.
† Ibid. P. 239.

muſt

muſt naturally raiſe ſome Expectation, and that Expectation will not be diſappointed. They are the evident Reſult of a ſound Judgment, matured by long Experience and a thorough Knowledge of Mankind, and are every Way worthy of one who was himſelf ſo great a Maſter of that Species of Compoſition and Elocution. It was his Purpoſe, after ſpeaking of ſtated Inſtructions, to have gone on to occaſional ones; but he did not live, as he himſelf foreboded he ſhould not, to accompliſh that Deſign.

The Conduct which he obſerved towards the ſeveral Diviſions and Denominations of Chriſtians in this Kingdom, was ſuch as ſhewed his Way of thinking to be truly liberal and catholic. The dangerous Spirit of Popery indeed, he thought, ſhould always be kept under proper legal Reſtraints, on Account of its natural Oppoſition not only to the religious, but the civil Rights of Mankind. He therefore obſerved its Movements with Care, and exhorted his Clergy to do the ſame, eſpecially thoſe who were ſituated in the Midſt of Roman Catholic Families; againſt whoſe Influence they were charged to be upon their Guard, and were furniſhed with proper Books, or Inſtructions for

that

that Purpoſe. He took all fit Opportunities of combating the Errors of the Church of *Rome* in his own Writings *; and the beſt Anſwers, which were publiſhed to ſome of the late bold Apologies for Popery, were written at his Inſtance, and under his Direction. He had the good Fortune to preſerve ſome Perſons of Conſequence from embracing that Communion, and to receive ſeveral Converts from it, both of the Clergy and Laity, into the Church of *England*. When the Earl of *Radnor* moved in the Houſe of Lords for an Enquiry into the Number of Roman Catholics in this Kingdom, his Grace was very active in forwarding that Meaſure. The Return for his own Dioceſe was no more than 271; that, for all the Dioceſes in *England* and *Wales*, did not exceed 68,000; which, even when all due Allowances are made for unavoidable Errors of Computation in great Towns, more eſpecially in *London*, fell far ſhort of what by ſome well-meaning Perſons they were ſuppoſed or repreſented to be †. And

* See particularly his Sermons on the Rebellion in 1745, on the Proteſtant Working-Schools in *Ireland*, on the 5th of *November*, and a great Number of occaſional Paſſages to the ſame Purpoſe, in various Parts of his *Lectures*, *Sermons*, and other Works.

† Dr. MAYHEW affirms, that in the Year 1745 the Papiſts in *London*

And if we further reflect how many wealthy and noble Families in theſe Kingdoms have lately embraced the Proteſtant Religion, each of which would probably draw after it ſeveral other Converts of inferior Rank, it will appear perhaps the better grounded Conjecture of the two, (for it muſt at laſt be all Conjecture) that Popery is rather in a declining than a progreſſive State amongſt us. Certain at leaſt it is, that ſome late Events on the neighbouring Continent have ſhaken this huge Fabric of Superſtition to its very Foundation. One of its grand Supports, the Society of *Jeſuits*, is, in many Places, totally ſubverted; and the *Papal* Power itſelf is every where falling into Contempt. One may therefore ſurely hope, that Abſurdities which viſibly loſe Ground even in the moſt bigotted Countries, will not ſtand much Chance of retrieving their Loſs in this enlightened one.

But though thus prudently jealous of this corrupt Church, towards his Proteſtant Bre-

London only were 100,000, and that the People there were ſaid to be converted by hundreds and thouſands, if not ten thouſands every Year.—*Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 73. Had the good Doctor's Account been true, and theſe Converſions gone on (as ſome have imagined) encreaſing ever ſince, there would hardly have been a Proteſtant left by this Time in the Metropolis.

thren of all Perſuaſions he demeaned himſelf with great Mildneſs and Moderation. One very ſtriking Proof of this occurs in the Directions he gives his Clergy, with Regard to their Conduct towards thoſe who are commonly diſtinguiſhed by the Name of Methodiſts ‡. It is impoſſible to read that Paſſage without acknowledging the Juſtneſs of it, and conceiving the higheſt Opinion of the Writer's Philanthropy and good Senſe.

With the *Diſſenters* his Grace was ſincerely deſirous of cultivating a good Underſtanding. Though firmly attached to the Church of *England*, and ready on all proper Occaſions to defend its Diſcipline and Doctrines with becoming Spirit; yet it never inſpired him with any Deſire to oppreſs or aggrieve thoſe of a different Way of thinking, or to depart from the Principles of religious Liberty, by which he conſtantly regulated his own Conduct ||, and wiſhed that all others would regulate theirs. He conſidered the Proteſtant

‡ Second archiepiſcopal Charge, P. 280.

|| A ſtrong Confirmation of theſe Aſſertions may be ſeen in one of his Grace's Letters to Dr. LARDNER, written when he was Biſhop of *Oxford*, and preſerved in the Memoirs of that learned Man, which have been lately publiſhed, P. 98.

Diſſenters

Diſſenters in general as a conſcientious and valuable Claſs of Men, and was far from taking the Spirit of certain Writings to be the Spirit of the whole Body. With ſome of the moſt eminent of them, WATTS, DODDRIDGE, LELAND, CHANDLER, LARDNER, he maintained an Intercourſe of Friendſhip or Civility; by the moſt candid and conſiderate Part of them he was highly reverenced and eſteemed; and to ſuch amongſt them as needed Help, ſhewed no leſs Kindneſs and Liberality than to thoſe of his own Communion.

Nor was his Concern for the Proteſtant Cauſe confined to his own Country. He was well known as the great Patron and Protector of it in various Parts of *Europe*; from whence he had frequent Applications for Aſſiſtance, which never failed of being favourably received. To ſeveral foreign Proteſtants he allowed Penſions, to others he gave occaſional Relief, and to ſome of their Univerſities was an annual Benefactor.

There is therefore the utmoſt Reaſon to believe that he ſpoke the Language of his Heart, in Relation to theſe Matters, in the Concluſion of his Anſwer to Dr. MAYHEW, which well

deſerves to be here laid at full Length before the Reader.

" Our Inclination is to live in Friendſhip " with all the Proteſtant Churches. We aſſiſt " and protect thoſe on the Continent of *Europe* " as well as we are able. We ſhew our Re- " gard to that of *Scotland* as often as we have " an Opportunity, and believe the Members " of it are ſenſible that we do. To thoſe who " differ from us in this Part of the King- " dom, we neither attempt nor wiſh any In- " jury; and we ſhall gladly give Proofs to " every Denomination of Chriſtians in our " Colonies, that we are Friends to a Tolera- " tion even of the moſt intolerant, as far as it " is ſafe; and willing that all Mankind ſhould " poſſeſs all the Advantages, religious and " civil, which they can demand either in Law " or Reaſon. But with thoſe who approach " nearer to us in Faith and brotherly Love, " we are deſirous to cultivate a freer Commu- " nication, paſſing over all former Diſguſts, as " we beg that they would. If we give them " any ſeeming Cauſe of Complaint, we hope " they will ſignify it in the moſt amicable " Manner. If they publiſh it, we hope they " will preſerve Fairneſs and Temper. If they

" fail

" fail in either we muſt bear it with Patience, " but be excuſed from replying. If any " Writers on our Side have been leſs cool or " leſs civil than they ought and deſigned to " have been, we are ſorry for it, and exhort " them to change their Style if they write " again. For it is the Duty of all Men, how " much ſoever they differ in Opinion, to agree " in mutual Good-will and kind Behaviour *."

This Paſſage Dr. MAYHEW himſelf allows § to be written " in ſuch a candid, ſenſible, and " charitable Way, as did the Author great " Honour, ſhewed the amiable Spirit of Chriſ- " tianity in an advantageous Light," and was worthy the Pen of a Metropolitan, " whoſe " Chriſtian Moderation," he acknowledges to be " not the leaſt ſhining Part of his reſpect- " able Character †." And it may on the beſt Grounds be added, that Archbiſhop SECKER in this Place not only expreſſed his own real Sentiments, but thoſe of the preſent truly benevolent Primate, and of far the greateſt Part in every Rank of the *Engliſh* Clergy in general.

In public Affairs his Grace acted the Part of an honeſt Citizen, and a worthy Member

* Anſwer to MAYHEW, P. 68.
§ MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Pamphlet, P. 83.
† Ibid. P. 86.

of the *Britiſh* Legiſlature. From his very firſt Entrance into the Houſe of Peers, his parliamentary Conduct was uniformly upright and noble. He kept equally clear from the two Extremes of factious Petulance and ſervile Dependance; never wantonly thwarting Adminiſtration, from Motives of Party-Zeal, or private Pique, or perſonal Attachment, or a Paſſion for Popularity; nor yet going every Length with every Miniſter, from Views of Intereſt or Ambition. He admired and loved the Conſtitution of his Country, and wiſhed to preſerve it unaltered and unimpaired. So long as a due Regard to this was maintained, he thought it his Duty to ſupport the Meaſures of Government. But whenever they were evidently inconſiſtent with the public Welfare, he oppoſed them with Freedom and Firmneſs. Yet his Oppoſition was always tempered with the utmoſt Fidelity, Reſpect, and Decency, to the excellent Prince upon the Throne; and the moſt candid Allowances for the unavoidable Errors and Infirmities even of the very beſt Miniſters, and the peculiarly difficult Situation of thoſe who govern a free and high-ſpirited People. He ſeldom ſpoke in Parliament, except where the Intereſts of Religion and Virtue ſeemed to require

quire it; but whenever he did, he ſpoke with Propriety and Strength, and was heard with Attention and Deference. Though he never attached himſelf blindly to any one Set of Men, yet his chief political Connections were with the late Duke of NEWCASTLE, and Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE. To theſe he principally owed his Advancement, and he had the good Fortune to live long enough to ſhew his Gratitude to them or their Deſcendants, particularly to the former of them: with whoſe Solicitations though he did not always think it neceſſary to comply, when that Nobleman was at the Head of Affairs; yet when he was out of Power, the Archbiſhop readily embraced every Opportunity of obliging him; and gave him ſo many ſolid and undeniable Proofs of Friendſhip, that the Duke always ſpoke of his Grace's Behaviour to him in the ſtrongeſt Terms of Approbation, and made particular Mention of it to ſome of his Friends but a very ſhort Time before his own Death.

During more than ten Years that Dr. SECKER enjoyed the See of *Canterbury*, he reſided conſtantly at his archiepiſcopal Houſe at *Lambeth*; as being not only moſt commodiouſly ſituated for his own Studies and Employments, but for all thoſe who on various

Occaſions were continually obliged to have Recourſe to him. Theſe Reaſons weighed with him ſo much, that no Conſideration, not even that of Health itſelf, could ever prevail upon him to quit that Place for any Length of Time. A few Months before his Death indeed, the dreadful Pains he felt had compelled him to think of trying the *Bath* Waters; but that Deſign was ſtopt by the fatal Accident which put an End to his Life.

His Grace had been for many Years ſubject to the Gout, which in the latter Part of his Life returned with more Frequency and Violence, and did not go off in a regular Manner, but left the Parts affected for a long Time very weak, and was ſucceeded by Pains in different Parts of the Body. About a Year and a half before he died, after a Fit of the Gout, he was attacked with a Pain in the Arm near the Shoulder, which having continued about a Twelvemonth, a ſimilar Pain ſeized the upper and outer Part of the oppoſite Thigh, and the Arm ſoon became eaſier. This was much more grievous than the former, as it quickly diſabled him from walking, and kept him in almoſt continual Torment, except when he was in a reclined Poſition. During this Time he had two or three Fits of the Gout;

but

but neither the Gout nor Medicines alleviated theſe Pains, which, with the Want of Exerciſe, brought him into a general bad Habit of Body.

On *Saturday* the 30th of *July*, 1768, he was ſeized, as he ſat at Dinner, with a Sickneſs at his Stomach. He recovered himſelf before Night, but the next Evening, whilſt his Phyſicians were attending, and his Servants raiſing him on his Couch, he ſuddenly cried out that his Thigh-bone was broken. The Shock was ſo violent, that the Servants perceived the Couch to ſhake under him, and the Pain ſo acute and unexpected, that it overcame the Firmneſs he ſo remarkably poſſeſſed. He lay for ſome Time in great Agonies, but when the Surgeons arrived, and diſcovered with Certainty that the Bone was broken, he was perfectly reſigned, and never afterwards aſked a Queſtion about the Event. A Fever ſoon enſued. On *Tueſday* he became lethargic, and continued ſo till about Five o'Clock on *Wedneſday* Afternoon, when he expired with great Calmneſs, in the 75th Year of his Age.

On Examination, the Thigh-bone was found to be carious about four Inches in Length, and at nearly the ſame Diſtance from its Head. The Diſeaſe took its Riſe from the

internal Part of the Bone, and had ſo intirely deſtroyed its Subſtance, that Nothing remained at the Part where it was broken but a Portion of its outward Integument. And even this had many Perforations, one of which was large enough to admit two Fingers, and was filled with a fungous Subſtance ariſing from within the Bone. There was no Appearance of Matter about the Caries, and the ſurrounding Parts were in a ſound State. It was apparent, that the Torture which his Grace underwent during the gradual Corroſion of this Bone, muſt have been inexpreſſibly great. Out of Tenderneſs to his Family he ſeldom made any Complaints to them, but to his Phyſicians he frequently declared his Pains were ſo excruciating, that unleſs ſome Relief could be procured, he thought it would be impoſſible for human Nature to ſupport them long. Yet he bore them for upwards of ſix Months with aſtoniſhing Patience and Fortitude; ſat up generally the greater Part of the Day, admitted his particular Friends to ſee him, mixed with his Family at the uſual Hours, ſometimes with his uſual Chearfulneſs; and, except ſome very ſlight Defects of Memory, retained all his Faculties and Senſes in their full Vigour till within a few Days of his Death.

He

He was buried, purſuant to his own Directions, in a covered Paſſage, leading from a private Door of the Palace to the North Door of *Lambeth* Church; and he forbade any Monument or Epitaph to be placed over him.

By his Will he appointed the Reverend Dr. DANIEL BURTON, Canon of *Chriſt Church*, and Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT above-mentioned, his Executors; and left thirteen thouſand Pounds, in the three *per Cent.* Annuities, to Dr. PORTEUS and Dr. STINTON, his Chaplains, in Truſt; to pay the Intereſt thereof to Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter, during their joint Lives, or the Life of the Survivor; and after the Deceaſe of both thoſe Ladies, then eleven thouſand of the ſaid thirteen thouſand are to be transferred to the following charitable Purpoſes; *viz.*

To the Society for the Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts, for the general Uſes of the Society	1000	0	0
To the ſame Society, towards the Eſtabliſhment of a Biſhop or Biſhops in the King's Dominions in *America*	1000	0	0

To

	£.	s.	d.
To the Society for promoting Chriſtian Knowledge - -	500	0	0
To the *Iriſh* Proteſtant Working Schools - - - -	500	0	0
To the Corporation for relieving the Widows and Children of the poor Clergy - -	500	0	0
To the Society of the Stewards of the ſaid Charity - -	200	0	0
To *Bromley* College in *Kent* -	500	0	0
To the Hoſpitals of the Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*, at *Croydon*, *St. John* at *Canterbury*, and *St. Nicholas Harbledown*, £.500 each - - -	1500	0	0
To *St. George*'s and the *London* Hoſpitals, and the Lying-in Hoſpital in *Brownlow-ſtreet*, £.500 each - - -	1500	0	0
To the Aſylum in the Pariſh of *Lambeth* - - -	400	0	0
To the *Magdalen Hoſpital*, the *Lock Hoſpital*, the *Small-Pox* and *Inoculation Hoſpital*, to each of which his Grace was a Subſcriber, £.300 each -	900	0	0

To

	£.	s.	d.
To the Incurables at *St. Luke's Hoſpital* - - - -	500	0	0
Towards repairing or rebuilding the Houſes belonging to poor Livings in the Dioceſe of *Canterbury* - - - -	2000	0	0
£.	11000	0	0

Beſides theſe Benefactions, he left £. 1000 to be diſtributed amongſt his Servants; £. 200 to ſuch indigent Perſons as he had aſſiſted in his Life-time; £. 5000 to the two Daughters of his Nephew Mr. FROST; £. 500 to Mrs. SECKER, Widow of his Nephew Dr. GEORGE SECKER; and £. 200 to Dr. DANIEL BURTON. After the Payment of theſe and ſome other ſmaller Legacies, he left his real, and the Reſidue of his perſonal, Eſtate to his Nephew Mr. THOMAS FROST, of *Nottingham*.

Out of his private Library, he left to the archiepiſcopal one at *Lambeth* all ſuch Books as were not there before, which comprehended much the largeſt and moſt valuable Part of his own Collection; and a great Number of very learned MSS. written by himſelf on various Subjects,

Subjects, he bequeathed to the Manuſcript Library in the ſame Palace. His Lectures on the Catechiſm, his Manuſcript Sermons, &c. he left to be reviſed and publiſhed by his two Chaplains, Dr. STINTON and Dr. PORTEUS. His Options he gave to the Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*, the Biſhop of *London*, and the Biſhop of *Wincheſter*, for the Time being, in Truſt; to be diſpoſed of by them (as they become vacant) to ſuch Perſons as they ſhall in their Conſciences think it would have been moſt reaſonable and proper for him to have given them, had he been living.

Such were the laſt Bequeſts of Archbiſhop SECKER; of which it is enough to ſay, that they kept up the noble Uniformity of his Character to the End, and formed a very proper Concluſion to the Life of a truly great and good Man.

His Grace was in his Perſon tall and comely; in the early Part of Life ſlender, and rather conſumptive, but as he advanced in Years, his Conſtitution gained Strength, and his Size encreaſed, yet never to a Degree of Corpulency that was diſproportionate or troubleſome.

The Dignity of his Form correſponded well with

with the Greatneſs of his Mind, and inſpired at all Times Reſpect and Awe, but peculiarly ſo when he was engaged in any of the more ſolemn Functions of Religion; into which he entered with ſuch devout Earneſtneſs and Warmth, with ſo juſt a Conſciouſneſs of the Place he was in, and the Buſineſs he was about, as ſeemed to raiſe him above himſelf, and added new Life and Spirit to the natural Gracefulneſs of his Appearance.

His Countenance was open, ingenuous, and expreſſive of every Thing right. It varied eaſily with his Spirits and his Feelings; ſo as to be a faithful Interpreter of his Mind, which was incapable of the leaſt Diſſimulation. It could ſpeak Dejection, and on Occaſion, Anger, very ſtrongly. But when it meant to ſhew Pleaſure or Approbation, it ſoftened into the moſt gracious Smile, and diffuſed over all his Features the moſt benevolent and reviving Complacency that can be imagined.

His intellectual Abilities were of a much higher Claſs than they who never had any Opportunities of converſing intimately with him, and who form their Opinion of his

Talents from the general Plainneſs of his Language only, will perhaps be willing to allow. He had a quick Apprehenſion, a clear Diſcernment, a ſound Judgment, a retentive Memory. He poſſeſſed that native good Senſe, which is the grand Maſter-key to every Art and Science, and makes a Man ſkilful in Things he has never learnt, as ſoon as ever it becomes uſeful or neceſſary for him to know them. He compoſed with great Eaſe and Readineſs; and in the early Part of his Life, the Letters which he wrote to ſome of his moſt intimate Friends, were full of Imagination, Vivacity, and Elegance. But when he became a Pariſh-Prieſt, he found the Graces of Style inconſiſtent with the Purpoſes of paſtoral Inſtruction; and willingly ſacrificed the Reputation he might eaſily have acquired as a fine Writer, to the leſs ſhowy Qualifications of a uſeful one. From that Time he made it his principal Study to ſet every Thing he undertook to treat upon in the cleareſt Point of View; to bring his Thoughts and his Arguments as cloſe together, and to expreſs them in as few and as intelligible Words as poſſible; admitting none but what conveyed ſome new Idea, or were neceſſary

to

to throw new Light on the Subject; and never waſting his own Time or that of others, by ſtepping out of his Way for needleſs Embelliſhments. But though in general he thus confined himſelf to the ſevere Laws of didactic Compoſition, (in which indeed conſiſted his chief Excellence) yet he could be, where the Occaſion called for it, pathetic, animated, nervous; could riſe into that true Sublime, which conſiſts not in Pomp of Diction but Grandeur of Sentiment, expreſſed with Simplicity and Strength; of which his Sermons afford ſeveral admirable Specimens.

It ſeldom happens that Men of a ſtudious Turn acquire any great Degree of Reputation for their Knowledge of Buſineſs. That Love of Solitude and Contemplation which generally attends true Genius, and is neceſſary for any conſiderable Exertion of it, gives at the ſame Time a certain Indolence and Softneſs to the Mind, which equally indiſpoſes and unfits it for taking a Part in the buſy Scenes of Life. But Dr. SECKER's Talents were formed no leſs for Action than Speculation; nor was he more embarraſſed with Difficulties in the moſt intricate Affairs, than in the deepeſt Studies. In all the ſe-

veral

veral Stations that he paſſed through, he let Nothing ſuffer for Want of Attention and Care. Wherever his Advice and Aſſiſtance were called for, he never failed to be preſent, was ſcrupulouſly punctual to his Appointments, ſhewed himſelf a perfect Maſter of the Buſineſs that came before him, and went through it with Calmneſs and Diſpatch. And it was very obſervable, that though in all important Tranſactions, no one had greater Ideas, or proceeded on more enlarged and liberal Principles; yet where it was neceſſary, he could take Notice of the ſmalleſt and ſeemingly moſt trifling Circumſtances, and enter into the minuteſt Details with a Penetration and Exactneſs, which are ſeldom ſeen even in thoſe who are moſt practiſed in worldly Concerns.

His Learning was very extenſive, and on thoſe Points, which he ſtudied with any Degree of Attention, profound. He was well acquainted with the Greek and Latin Languages; had in the younger Part of his Life read with Taſte the beſt Authors in each; and of the latter more eſpecially had imbibed ſo ſtrong a Tincture, that when he was near ſeventy, after a Diſuſe of above forty Years, he compoſed the Latin Speech printed

at

at the End of his Charges; the Style of which is nervous, manly, and correct.

He poſſeſſed a large Share of critical Penetration, and ſcarce ever read any Book of Note without making Remarks upon it. Some of theſe ſtill remain amongſt his Manuſcripts. Some he communicated at different Times to the Editors or Tranſlators of ſeveral Claſſic Authors. But his chief Labours of this Kind were beſtowed on the holy Scriptures, for which he came well prepared by his Knowledge of the original Languages in which they were written. In *Hebrew* Literature more eſpecially, his Skill was ſo well known and acknowledged, that few Works of Eminence in that Branch of Learning were publiſhed, without being firſt ſubmitted to his Examination, and receiving conſiderable Improvement from his Corrections. He was the firſt Promoter, and always a liberal Encourager, of that very uſeful Work, *The Collation of the Hebrew Manuſcripts of the Old Teſtament*, undertaken by Dr. KENNICOTT, and now brought to a Concluſion. The greateſt Part of his leiſure Hours was employed in ſtudying the original Text of the ſacred Writings: in comparing it with all the

antient Verſions; in collecting together the Remarks made upon it by the moſt ingenious and learned Authors, antient and modern, Jewiſh and Chriſtian; in applying to the ſame Purpoſe every Thing he accidentally met with in the Courſe of his reading, that had any Tendency to explain and illuſtrate it; and ſuperadding to the Whole, his own Obſervations and Conjectures, ſome of which have been ſince confirmed by the beſt Manuſcripts. The Reſult of theſe Labours appears, in ſome Degree, in the ſhort and maſterly Explications of Scripture, interſperſed occaſionally in his Lectures and Sermons; but more particularly in the interleaved Bibles, and the theological Diſſertations hereafter mentioned.

But his Attention was not ſolely confined to the Scriptures. He had ſtudied carefully ſome of the beſt Chriſtian Writers of the primitive Ages, and without relying implicitly on their Judgement, or adopting their Errors, knew well how to avail himſelf of their real Excellencies. Of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory he was a great Maſter: had a clear Idea of the Progreſs of Chriſtianity from its firſt Promulgation to the preſent Times, of the various Revolu-

tions

tions it had paſſed through, the different Grounds on which it had been oppoſed or vindicated, the Steps by which the Corruptions of it had been gradually introduced, the Arts by which they had been ſo long maintained, and the providential Coincidence of Events which afterwards contributed to remove them. He was well acquainted with the various Sects, into which the Church was antiently, and is at preſent divided; he underſtood the Nature and Tendency of their reſpective Tenets, the State of the Controverſies ſubſiſting amongſt them, the reſpective Merits of their beſt Writers, the proper Conduct to be obſerved towards each, and the good Uſes that might be made of all. And though in his Writings he never made a needleſs Oſtentation of all this Learning, yet they who examine ſome of the plaineſt of them cloſely and critically, will find them to be the Reſult of deep Thought and a comprehenſive Knowledge of his Subject; will find that he expreſſes himſelf on almoſt every Point with Propriety, Preciſion, and Certainty; without any thing crude or injudicious, without any of thoſe raſh Aſſertions and haſty Concluſions, into which they, who have but a ſuperficial

View of Things, and know not what Ground they ſtand upon, are perpetually falling.

The beſt modern Publications in moſt Parts of uſeful Learning, but more eſpecially thoſe which immediately related to his own Profeſſion, or were in any Degree connected with it, he conſtantly read; was one of the firſt to give a ſatisfactory Account of them, to commend them if they deſerved it, to point out and obviate their Errors, if they contained any which he thought material. But there was one Part of his literary Character extremely amiable, and, in the Degree at leaſt, almoſt peculiar to him; and that was, the incredible Pains he would take in reviſing, correcting, and improving the Works of others. This he did in numberleſs Inſtances beſides thoſe which have here been mentioned, with equal Zeal and Judgment; and ſome of thoſe Compoſitions which now ſtand deſervedly higheſt in the Eſtimation of the Public, and will go down with encreaſing Fame to future Ages, owe no inconſiderable Share of their Merit to his Corrections and Communications.

The Number of valuable Writings which he has left behind him is very conſiderable.

Beſides

Beſides the two Volumes of occaſional Sermons, which appeared in his Life-time, the Lectures on the Catechiſm and the Charges publiſhed ſince his Death, and the four Volumes of Sermons now offered to the Public, he has bequeathed to the Manuſcript Library at *Lambeth*, a great Variety of learned and curious Pieces, written by himſelf, to be preſerved there under the ſole Care of the Archbiſhop for the Time being, and to be inſpected by no one without his Grace's expreſs Permiſſion.

Amongſt theſe Manuſcripts, ſome of the moſt remarkable are; an interleaved *Engliſh* Bible, in four Volumes in Folio, with occaſional Remarks; upon the New Teſtament very copious; tending chiefly to clear up Difficulties, and to correct and improve the preſent Tranſlation, with a View probably to a new one; MICHAELIS's *Hebrew* Bible, filled with Compariſons of the antient Verſions, Emendations, and Conjectures on the original Text; two Folio Volumes of Notes upon *Daniel*; a great Number of critical Diſſertations on controverted Paſſages of Scripture; Remarks on ſome modern Publications; and ſeveral Volumes of Miſcellanies, written in the former

Part of his Life, containing chiefly Extracts from various Authors, and Obſervations upon them, the Objections of ſceptical Writers to the Truth of Revelation, with Anſwers to ſome, and Materials or Hints for Anſwers to many others.

It may juſtly ſeem ſurpriſing, that in a Life ſo active, ſo full of Employment and Avocation from Study *, the Archbiſhop could find Leiſure to read ſo much, and to leave behind him ſo many Writings; ſome of them learned and critical; all of them full of good Senſe and uſeful Knowledge. The Fact is, that in him were united two Things which very rarely meet together, but, when they do, can produce Wonders, ſtrong Parts, and unwearied Induſtry. He roſe at Six the whole Year round, and had often ſpent a buſy Day, before others began to enjoy it. His whole Time was marked out and appropriated in the moſt regular Manner to particular Employments, and he never ſuf-

* Ille primum habuit in multiplicibus quibus diſtrictus eſt curis, nulli deeſſe; neque quiſquam fuit qui literarum ſtudiis majorem operam otioſus poſuit, quam ille occupatiſſimo in loco. In aliis quidem hominibus ingenium excellens, et multiplicem ſcientiam agnoſcimus, in aliis conſilium, auctoritatem, probitatem, conſtantiam; in quo autem hæc omnia ita abunde convenerint haud facilè inveniemus. *Concio ad Clerum, & oratiuncula, a Gulielmo Markham habitæ*, 1769, P. 25. Sold by T. PAYNE.

fered

fered even thoſe broken Portions of it, which are ſeldom much regarded, to be idly thrown away. The Strength of his Conſtitution happily kept Pace with the Activity of his Mind, and enabled him to go on inceſſantly from one Buſineſs to another with almoſt unremitted Application, till, his Spirits being quite exhauſted, he was obliged at laſt to have Recourſe to Reſt, which however he always took Care to make as ſhort as poſſible.

Induſtry like this, continued through a long Courſe of Years, could not poſſibly be the Effect of any Thing but that which was indeed at the Bottom of it, a ſtrong Senſe of Duty. It was not becauſe the Archbiſhop had leſs Reliſh for Eaſe, or leſs Diſlike to Fatigue than other Men, that his Diligence and Perſeverance ſo far exceeded theirs; but becauſe he thought himſelf bound to labour for the Good of Mankind, and that all Indolence and Self-indulgence, which interfered with this, was in ſome Degree criminal. Whenever therefore he was engaged (as he was almoſt continually) in ſerving others, he never reckoned his own Time or Pains for any Thing, nor did it ſeem ſo much as once to enter into his Thoughts, that he ought to allow himſelf any Amuſement.

Even the Pleaſures of polite Literature, which were highly grateful to him, he thought himſelf obliged to relinquiſh for the peculiar Studies of his Profeſſion, and theſe again for the practical Duties of Religion, and the daily Offices of common Life. On this Principle he made it a Point to be at all Times acceſſible. Even in thoſe early Hours, which were more peculiarly dedicated to Retirement and Study, if any one came to him on the ſmalleſt Pretence of Buſineſs, he would inſtantly break off the moſt pleaſing or moſt abſtruſe Speculations, receive his Viſitor with perfect good Humour, and ſacrifice thoſe precious Moments to Duty, to Civility, to the ſlighteſt Propriety, which he would on no Account have given up to Relaxation or Repoſe.

This indeed was only one Inſtance, amongſt many others, of that wonderful Command he had obtained over his moſt favourite Inclinations, and the Facility with which he controlled his ſtrongeſt Paſſions. His Temper was naturally quick and impatient; but by keeping a watchful Eye over the Movements of his own Mind, and preſcribing to himſelf certain excellent Rules and Precautions to which he inviolably adhered, he ſo totally ſubdued this

dangerous Propenſity, that few who knew him had any Suſpicion of his being ſubject to it. Sometimes indeed, on very trying Occaſions, he might be ſeen ready to kindle on a ſudden into ſome Expreſſions of Anger, and as ſuddenly recollecting and checking himſelf; keeping down the riſing Tumult within him, and reſuming almoſt inſtantaneouſly his uſual Mildneſs and Compoſure.

In him appeared all the Efficacy of religious Principle, the Calmneſs, the Greatneſs of Mind, the Fortitude, the Chearfulneſs, which no other Principle could inſpire, ſupport, and improve through a whole Life. That fervent yet rational Piety, which glowed in his Writings, which animated his Devotions, was the genuine Effuſion of his Soul, the ſupreme Guide and Director of his Actions and Deſigns. It was not, as is ſometimes the Caſe, aſſumed occaſionally, and laid aſide when the Eye of the World was not upon him; but was the ſame in private as in public, to thoſe who obſerved him at a Diſtance, and thoſe who lived and converſed intimately with him, who had Opportunities of ſeeing him at all Hours, and under all Circumſtances, in his retired and ſerious as well as in his freeſt and moſt chearful Moments.

Moments. The Honour of God, and the Intereſts of Religion, were evidently neareſt his Heart. He thought of them, he talked of them, he was concerned and anxious for them, he ſought out for Opportunities of advancing them, he was careful not to ſay or do any Thing that might hurt them in the Eſtimation of Mankind. This it was which kept up that uniform Decency and Propriety ſo remarkable in his whole Deportment, which preſerved him from every unbecoming Levity of Behaviour and Converſation, added Weight and Dignity to his Character, and raiſed him above all the common Meanneſſes of merely ſecular Men.

His Soul was generous beyond Deſcription. Even when his Income was but moderate, and the Proviſion made for his Family very ſlender, he lived hoſpitably, and gave liberally. As his Revenues encreaſed, his Beneficence roſe in Proportion, inſomuch, that after the firſt Expences of his Promotion to the See of *Canterbury* were over, his charitable Donations were conſiderably more than two thouſand Pounds a Year. On all proper Occaſions his Heart and his Hand were ſo free, that he ſeemed not to have, as indeed he had not, the

leaſt

leaſt Regard for Money. The Eaſe and Readineſs with which he gave away the largeſt Sums, plainly ſhewed, that long Habit had rendered it quite natural and familiar to him, and that he ſaw Nothing wonderful or extraordinary in Acts of Generoſity, which others could not obſerve without Surprize.

They who applied to him on Account of any public Subſcription, in Favour of any Thing uſeful or even ornamental to his Country, commonly received much more than they expected; and were frequently withheld from repeating their Solicitations, through Fear, not of being denied, but of treſpaſſing too far on a Liberality that ſeemed to know no Bounds. In Matters of private Charity, the Number of indigent Perſons whom he relieved by occaſional Benefactions, or ſupported by annual Penſions, was very great. Yet his Favours were not laviſhed away with undiſtinguiſhing Profuſion. He took Pains to find out the real Merits and Diſtreſſes of thoſe who aſked Relief from him, and endeavoured, as far as he was able, to ſingle out the virtuous and religious, as peculiar Objects of his Bounty. He thought it a material Part of true Benevolence, to have an Eye not only to the Removal of Miſery,

but

but the Encouragement of Piety and good Morals. With this View he was particularly attentive to ſuch Charities as were calculated to advance uſeful Knowledge or ſpiritual Improvement; which he made a Point of encouraging by his Example, not only as being in themſelves highly beneficial, but alſo ſtrangely diſregarded ſometimes by very worthy, and, in other Reſpects, very conſiderate Perſons.

In the Government of his Family, there was an Air of Eaſe and Generoſity without any Affectation of Magnificence or Show. His Houſe was hoſpitable, and his Table plentiful, yet plain and ſimple. He wiſhed to have every Thing ſuitable to his Rank, but would conſent to Nothing beyond it. He thought it right in one of his Station and Profeſſion to diſcountenance, as far as he could, all luxurious Elegancies. He would therefore never give into ſeveral faſhionable Accommodations, nor admit extraordinary Delicacies to his Table, nor even accept them when offered to him. He received his Company with Politeneſs and good Humour, and entertained them, when he was in Health and Spirits, with lively and improving Converſation. He could make pertinent Obſervations on almoſt any Topic that happened

to

to be ſtarted, how remote ſoever from the natural Courſe of his Studies. Men of eminent Worth or Learning he diſtinguiſhed by peculiar Notice, led the Diſcourſe to ſuch Subjects as called out their reſpective Excellencies, and ſhewed that they ſpoke before one who could judge well of their Merits.

Yet it muſt be owned that he was not always equally affable and obliging. There was ſometimes a Reſerve and Coldneſs in his Manner, that threw a Damp on Converſation, and prevented Strangers from being perfectly at their Eaſe before him. This was by ſome imputed to Pride. But in Reality it aroſe from very different Cauſes; ſometimes from bodily Pain, which he often felt when he did not own it; ſometimes from his Spirits being waſted or depreſſed by the Fatigues of the Morning; ſometimes from accidental Uneaſineſſes ariſing in the Courſe of Buſineſs, which he could not immediately ſhake off his Mind. To this ſhould be added, that the natural Loftineſs of his Figure, and the Opinion generally and juſtly entertained of his Learning and Strictneſs of Life, were of themſelves apt to produce a kind of Awe and Conſtraint in his Company, when he was far from wiſhing to inſpire it.

It

It was remarkable that he choſe always rather to talk of Things than Perſons; was very ſparing in giving his Opinion of Characters, very candid when he did. Of his own good Deeds or great Attainments he never ſpoke, nor loved to hear others ſpeak. Compliments were very irkſome to him. They viſibly put him out of Humour, and gave him actual Pain; and he would ſometimes expreſs his Diſlike of them in ſuch plain Terms, as effectually prevented a Repetition of them from the ſame Perſon.

To his Domeſtics he was a gentle and indulgent Maſter. Many of them he ſuffered to continue with their Families in his Houſe after they were married. None of them were diſcharged on Account of Sickneſs or Infirmity, but were aſſiſted with the beſt Advice that could be had at a great yearly Expence. Thoſe who had attended him in Illneſs, or ſerved him long and faithfully, he never failed to reward with an unſparing Hand. Towards his other Dependants, his Behaviour was even and friendly. He expected every one about him to do their Duty, of which he himſelf firſt ſet them the Example; and, provided they did ſo with any tolerable Care, they were

were ſecure of his Favour. Of ſlight Faults he took no Notice; of great ones he would expreſs his Senſe at the Time ſtrongly; but never ſuffered them to dwell or rankle on his Mind, or operate to the future Prejudice of thoſe whoſe general Conduct was right. To his Relations he was continually doing the beſt-natured, the handſomeſt, the moſt generous Things; aſſiſting them in Difficulties, comforting them in Affliction, promoting their Intereſts, and improving their Circumſtances reaſonably, not aggrandizing or enriching them invidiouſly.

The unaltered Kindneſs he ſhewed to the two Ladies that lived with him from the Time of his Marriage to that of his Death, that is, for upwards of two-and-forty Years, was a remarkable Inſtance of ſteady Friendſhip; and ſhewed that his Soul was no leſs formed for that rare Union of virtuous Minds, than for every other generous Affection. The younger of thoſe two Ladies, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, (who, to the fineſt Imagination and the moſt elegant Accompliſhments of her Sex, added the gentleſt Manners, and a Diſpoſition thoroughly benevolent and devout,) did not long ſurvive the Arch-

Archbiſhop. She died on the 9th of *January* laſt, in the 49th Year of her Age.

Thus much it has been judged requiſite to lay before the World in Relation to Archbiſhop SECKER; not with any View of exalting his Character higher than it deſerves, which is quite needleſs; but of making its real Value more generally known, and of reſcuing it from the Miſrepreſentations of a few miſinformed or malevolent Men. To ſome, no Doubt, the Portrait here drawn of him will appear a very flattering one; but it will be much eaſier to call than to prove it ſuch. Nothing has been advanced but what is founded on the moſt authentic Evidence, nor has any Circumſtance been deſignedly ſtrained beyond the Truth. And if his Grace did really live and act in ſuch a Manner that the moſt faithful Delineation of his Conduct muſt neceſſarily have the Air of a Panegyric, the Fault is not in the Copy, but in the Original.

After this plain Repreſentation of Facts therefore, it cannot be thought neceſſary to enter here into a particular Examination of the various Falſhoods, which his Grace's Enemies have ſo induſtriouſly circulated, in order

der to fix, if poſſible, ſome Stain upon his Reputation. It would be very unreaſonable to expect that he of all others, ſo high in Rank and ſo active in the Diſcharge of his Duty, ſhould, amidſt the preſent Rage of Defamation, eſcape without his full Share of Cenſure; and it would be very weak to apprehend the leaſt ill Conſequences from it. There is ſo little Doubt from what Quarter thoſe Invectives come, and to what Cauſes they are owing, that they do not appear to have made the ſlighteſt Impreſſion on any unprejudiced Mind, and, for Want of Ground to ſupport them, are ſinking hourly into Oblivion. If a Life ſpent like Archbiſhop SECKER's, and a Spirit ſuch as breathes through every Page of his Writings, are not a ſufficient Confutation of all ſuch idle Calumnies, it is in vain to think that any Thing elſe can be ſo. All that his Friends have to do, is to wait a little While with Patience and Temper. Time never fails to do ample Juſtice to ſuch Characters as his; which, if left to themſelves, will always riſe by their own Force above the utmoſt Efforts made to depreſs them, and acquire freſh Luſtre every Day in the Eyes of all conſiderate and diſpaſſionate Men.

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SERMON I.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things; hold fast that which is good: abstain from all Appearance of Evil.

BY the extensive Word, *all*, the Apostle in this Place evidently means no more, than *all Things* which may be right or wrong in Point of Conscience. And by *proving them* he means, not that we should try them both by Experience, which would be an absurd and pernicious Direction: but that we should examine them by our Facu'ty of Judgement, which is a wise and useful Exhortation. Accordingly Christianity recommends itself to us at first Sight by this peculiar Presumption of its being the true Religion, that it makes Application to Men as reasonable Creatures, and claims our Assent on Account of the Proofs, which it offers. By these alone it prevailed originally: on these it still relies; and requires

Faith for the Principle of our Obedience, only becauſe it produces Evidence for the Ground of our Faith. Now ſuch an Inſtitution ſurely is intitled to receive the fair Treatment which it gives, when it aſks of Mankind no more than this; that they ſhould firſt conſider well the ſeveral Obligations they are under; then adhere to whatever they find to be enjoined them, and laſtly avoid whatever they conceive to be forbidden: which momentous Duties I ſhall endeavour to explain and enforce in three Diſcourſes on the Text.

That Beings, capable of Thought, are obliged to think, is very obvious: that they ſhould think with the greateſt Care on Subjects of the greateſt Importance, is equally ſo: and the Queſtion, what Obligations we are under, is plainly of the utmoſt Importance. For our Behaviour, and conſequently our Happineſs, depends on the Determination of it. Therefore we are juſt as much bound to conduct our Underſtandings well, as our Tempers or outward Actions. And the Opportunities given us of ſhewing, either Diligence in procuring Information, and Fairneſs in judging upon it, or the contrary, are Trials, which God hath appointed, of every one's moral Character; and perhaps

haps the chief Trials, which ſome have to go through. Every Inſtance, greater or leſs, of wilfully diſregarding Truth, inſtead of ſeeking and embracing it, argues a proportionable Depravity of Heart; whether the Diſlike be manifeſted in a ſtudious Oppoſition to it, or an indolent Scorn of it.

There are ſome who openly profeſs an utter Contempt of all Inquiry; deſpiſe ſuch as are ſolicitous either about Belief or Practice, and even affect a Thoughtleſsneſs, which they find to be grown faſhionable. Now really, if this be an Accompliſhment, it is one, that whoever will may eaſily be Maſter of. But ſurely Men ought to think ſeriouſly once for all, before they reſolve for the reſt of their Days to think no more. There are ſtrong Appearances, that many Things of great Conſequence are incumbent on us. No one can be ſure, that theſe Appearances are fallacious, till he hath examined into them. Many, who have, are fully perſuaded of their Truth. And if there be ſuch Things in the World as Folly and Guilt, it can never be either wiſe or innocent to diſdain giving ourſelves any Trouble about the Matter, and take it abſolutely for granted, that we may live as we will: a De-

ciſion of ſuch a Nature, that were it made on ſeemingly ever ſo good Grounds, it would be very fit to review them well from Time to Time, for fear of a Miſtake that muſt be fatal.

And if a general Neglect of conſidering our Conduct be criminal, a Neglect of conſidering any Part of it muſt, in its Degree, be criminal alſo. Many have weighed carefully, and obſerve conſcientiouſly, ſome Duties of Life; but will not reflect a Moment, whether it be allowable for them to behave, in other Points, as they do. And yet, if any moral Obligation deſerves Regard, every ſuch Obligation deſerves it equally. And when the Queſtion comes to be, what is indeed ſuch, and what not, impartial Reaſon, well directed, muſt be Judge; not Inclination or Fancy: for if theſe can make Things lawful, nothing will be unlawful. And therefore, inſtead of ever following ſuch Guides implicitly, we ſhould always have the greater Suſpicion that we are going wrong, the more vehemently they preſs us to go forward.

Some again have ſearched, and obtained Satisfaction, they ſay, concerning every Article of Morals; but will not concern themſelves about Religion. Yet ſurely the Inquiry, whether there

be

be a wiſe and juſt Ruler of this Univerſe or not; and if there be, what Homage he expects from us; and what we have to hope or fear from him, according as we pay it, or refuſe it; is as material a one, as ever was made. And on what Pretence any one can doubt whether it be worth making, and reverently too, it is impoſſible to ſay.

Another Sort declare, that they have a ſettled Conviction of natural Religion, (would God they would aſk their Hearts, what Feelings of it they cultivate, what Marks of it they ſhew,) but treat Revelation at the ſame Time, as totally unworthy of being conſidered. Yet that our heavenly Father can give us very uſeful Information both of what we did not know before, and of what we could not know elſe, is at leaſt as credible, as it is certain that we can give ſuch one to another. And that he may with Juſtice give ſome Men greater Advantages than others by ſupernatural Diſcoveries, is no leſs clear than that he may give them ſuch Advantages by their natural Abilities and Circumſtances. If then God may do this for us, it is a moſt intereſting Queſtion, whether he hath or not; and an indiſpenſable Precept, which the Words, immediately preceding the Text, expreſs when

joined with it. *Despise not Prophecyings: prove all Things.*

But there is yet a different Set of Persons, who confess, that both our Attention, and our Assent, are due to Christianity in general, but who are against discussing any of its Doctrines in particular. Provided Men know but enough of it, to keep them well-behaved and quiet, nothing further, they conceive, is needful: whatever Sentiments about speculative Points happen to prevail, should be supported, and no Disputes allowed to break in upon the Peace of the World. Now it is very true, that Society should not be disturbed by Contentions about Opinions, as it hath often been most dreadfully: nor Men be perplexed about Questions of mere Curiosity, instead of learning better Things; nor frightened, or estranged from each other by laying Stress on Points of mere Nicety. And the New Testament strongly forbids all these Things. But still, if the Christian Religion be from Heaven, it cannot be a Matter of Indifference, what its real Doctrines are: nor can its Author have given us the Liberty of professing others in their Stead. Some of them may seem, and perhaps may be, though that doth not follow, of small Consequence

ſequence to the Purpoſes of common Life: but if they convey to us juſt Notions of God, and of thoſe Relations of ours to him, which are never the leſs real for not being diſcoverable by Reaſon; if they inſtruct us in the Duties, which thoſe Relations require, and form us to that State of Mind, which he knows to be requiſite for enjoying the Happineſs of another World, be their Connexion with this World ever ſo little, ſurely they are important enough. Some of them alſo have Doubts and Difficulties attending them; as even the Doctrines of natural Religion, and the Duties of Morality have: but theſe were intended to furniſh us with Opportunities of ſhewing Uprightneſs in judging where we are qualified to judge; and Humility in ſubmitting our ſhallow Imaginations to unfathomable Wiſdom, where we are not; the Exerciſe of which Virtues here will fit us for a plentiful Reward hereafter. And would Men but once prevail on themſelves to expreſs their Thoughts on controverted Subjects with Decency and Candour: Society, inſtead of ſuffering by Debates, would receive much Benefit. Chriſtianity would be better underſtood; and therefore more juſtly eſteemed, and more diſcreetly practiſed: it would be built on firmer

Foundations, and therefore be ſecurer againſt all Aſſaults.

There ſtill remains a large Number of Chriſtians, I mean the Advocates of the Church of *Rome*, who are indeed by no Means indifferent what Doctrines are held, but vehemently oppoſe entering into any Diſquiſitions about them; and would have us, inſtead of that, firſt look out for an infallible Guide, and then follow him blindfold. But they have never been able to ſhew, that ſuch Infallibility exiſts amongſt Men; or even to agree with each other determinately, in whom they ſhould place it. And the Scripture, far from directing us to examine this one Claim, and after that never to examine more, directs us in many Places, but particularly in the Text, by as plain Words as can be written, to *prove*, that is, examine, *all Things*. But were this otherwiſe, their Pretenſion will require no long Examination: for it is in vain to argue that ſuch or ſuch Men cannot miſtake, when it notoriouſly appears in Fact, that they have miſtaken.

Every Article therefore both of Morals and Religion may and ought to be tried, in ſuch Manner as can be reaſonably expected from the Parts, Attainments and Circumſtances of each

each Perſon: and concerning this, we ſhould both judge modeſtly for ourſelves, and conſult others with Deference. For attempting too much will be more likely to miſlead, than improve us.

But then the more general and important this Duty of Inquiry is, the more Care muſt be taken to perform it aright. For many pique themſelves on a moſt unbounded Zeal for Freedom of Thought, and a thorough Search into Things, who yet by no Means deſerve the Character which they aſſume.

Some of them fancy they have thought very freely upon Religion. Now this is, in one Senſe, treating it freely indeed, but no Proof of thinking upon it at all. For mere diſbelieving is no more an Evidence of having examined, than mere believing is. However, at leaſt, they ſay, they have thrown off the Prejudices, in which they were bred up: and throwing off Prejudices muſt be right. But then they are many of them for extirpating, under that odious Name, original natural Diſpoſitions in the Heart of Man. For Inſtance: the Propenſity, that we all experience to revere an inviſible Power; the Eſteem that we all feel of Juſtice and Truth, of Mercy and Good-

Goodneſs, of Honour and Decency; are as real Conſtituents of our inward Frame, as any Paſſion or Appetite, that belongs to it. Yet theſe Principles, which direct us to every Thing that is good, they would perſuade us to root out as Prejudices; while they plead earneſtly for the Inclinations, that continually prompt us to Vice, as Dictates of Nature. And a Part of our Nature undoubtedly they are: but a Part lamentably diſordered; and which, in its beſt Eſtate, the other and higher was evidently deſigned to govern and reſtrain. At leaſt, to ſet out with taking the contrary for granted; and condemn Things at once, as groundleſs Prepoſſeſſions, which have ſo reſpectable an Appearance of being the primitive Guides of Life, is by no Means inquiring freely.

Another falſe Notion concerning Prejudices, though at firſt Sight a plauſible one, is, that we ought to diveſt ourſelves of all Deſire to find Religion true, before we go about to judge of it. Now it is impoſſible, that a Perſon of a worthy Mind ſhould do ſo. He may indeed, and will take Care, not to be miſled by his Deſire. But he neither can, nor ought to be indifferent concerning a Point, on which his own eternal Happineſs, and that of every good Man

upon Earth, depends. Nor is this the only Case, far from it, in which we are bound to wish on one Side, and yet determine fairly between both. In judicial Proceedings, a benevolent Magistrate will constantly wish, that whoever is accused before him may prove innocent: notwithstanding which, he will try his Cause with the most upright Impartiality.

But if this Degree of Prepossession in Favour of Religion be right, how exceedingly wrong must Prepossession against it be! What are we to think of those, and what have they Cause to think of themselves, who can take Pleasure in that comfortless and horrid View of Things, which Infidelity gives; and triumph in believing, that *there is* no *Reward for the righteous*, no *God that judgeth the Earth*[a]! One would hope they do not see distinctly, and yet it is exceedingly visible, what Malevolence to human Kind rejoicing in a Thought of this Nature implies.

Or if they do not wish against Religion in general, yet, if they wish against the Christian Religion, they are Enemies to a Doctrine, which confirms very powerfully all the great Truths that Reason teaches; which clears up, intirely

[a] Psalm lviii. 10.

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to our Advantage, many tormenting Doubts, that Reaſon leaves us involved in; and which, however it may have been perverted, (as every good Thing in the World hath) undeniably is in its Nature an Inſtitution the moſt completely fitted to make Men happy in themſelves and one another, in the preſent State and the future, that ever was. Did we then ſee thoſe, who profeſs themſelves unſatisfied about its Evidence, afraid it was inſufficient; grieved that the Proofs appeared no ſtronger, and the Objections ſo conſiderable; this would ſhew a Mind, which the Scripture calls *noble*[b], *not far from the Kingdom of God*[c]. And at Times, they moſt of them affect to ſeem thus diſpoſed; and will aſſure ſuch as preſs them upon the Subject, that, of all Things, they wiſh they could but be ſo happy as to believe. But why then were they in ſuch Haſte to diſbelieve, and moſt of them to act viciouſly upon their Diſbelief? Why would they not hear and conſider firſt? Why will they not now reconſider the Subject, and acquaint themſelves with the Defences of our Faith, as well as the Attacks made upon it? Why do they delight in making Converts of all that they can? Why are they ſo prone to ridicule, or calum-

[b] Acts xvii. 2. [c] Mark xii. 34.

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niate thoſe, whom they cannot? Such Symptoms look very ſuſpicious; and ſhould induce thoſe, who are conſcious of them, to put the Queſtion home to themſelves, whether this great good Will to Religion be really the Temper, with which they have ever inquired into it, or do now inwardly think of it; or whether indeed their Profeſſions are only a ſpecious Manner of talking, occaſionally taken up to ſerve a Turn. If the latter be the Caſe, they muſt, in order to be fair Doubters, guard againſt another Sort of Prejudices, than they imagined.

Some Prejudices, either right or wrong, will take hold of us very ſoon. And therefore it is fit, that, as far as we can, we ſhould examine the Foundation of our early Opinions; but with Equity, with Candour, not with a Reſolution beforehand to find Fault: for as they are never the truer for our being educated in them, they are never the falſer either. But indeed the Education of many hath placed them ſo very little in the Way, either of receiving Prejudices, or hearing Arguments in Favour of Religion; that they have Need to begin with throwing off Prejudices to its Diſadvantage; and ſhould ſuſpect that much more may be ſaid for it, than the little, which hath come to their Knowledge.

It

It is probable, that they might have ſome Impreſſions of Piety, ſuch as they were, made upon them by the Superintendants of their Childhood; and it is poſſible, that ſomething may have been added ſince to theſe Impreſſions, by their Attendance, if haply they have been ſuffered to attend, on public Inſtruction. But as ſoon as they begin to ſee a little more of the World, and obſerve what paſſes around them, what a Number of Things will they meet with, likely to give them a much ſtronger Bias towards Infidelity, than the Forms of a common Education have given them towards Faith! They will find but too many declared Unbelievers, and even Teachers of Unbelief: very many, who, if they do not expreſsly deny Chriſtianity, ſpeak and act as if they deſpiſed it; and few, in Compariſon, that vouchſafe it a ſerious and uniform Regard. The Abuſes of Religion they will hear moſt invidiouſly magnified; the Benefits of it moſt artfully and maliciouſly depreciated; the public Worſhip of God condemned, as idle Formality; the private, as enthuſiaſtic Folly; the Miniſters of his Word repreſented as Objects only of Contempt or Abhorrence: and the Conſequence hath been, that, by thinking of us in a Manner, which, with all our Faults, God forbid we

ſhould

ſhould deſerve, Multitudes are come to think of the Goſpel, that we preach, in a Manner, which they certainly ought not, did we deſerve ever ſo ill. When Prejudices from without, like theſe, are added to the vehement ones within, which Vanity forms againſt every Thing that would humble it, and Paſſions and Appetites againſt every Thing that would reſtrain them; it is eaſy to perceive, where the Danger of Partiality lies; and what Prepoſſeſſions the Company they have kept, the Books they have read, the Lives they have led, make neceſſary to be baniſhed by too many, if they would become fair Enquirers.

Let it therefore be examined, on what Foundation the Notions, that we have learned, of Religion and Virtue ſtand. But let it be examined alſo, on what Foundation the prevailing Notions, which contradict Religion and Virtue ſtand. For to lay it down as a Maxim, that theſe are well grounded, and diſcard the former merely on that Preſumption, is monſtrouſly unreaſonable. We own it to be highly proper, that Men ſhould aſk themſelves, why they believe: but it is equally proper for them to aſk, why they diſbelieve. Undoubtedly they ſhould not be Bigots and Zealots: but

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then they ſhould not be ſo againſt Religion, any more than for it. Implicit Faith is wrong: but implicit Infidelity is yet more ſo. And whatever Fault may be found with the Truſt, which it is ſaid the godly repoſe in their ſpiritual Guides; it is full as poſſible, and perhaps in Proportion full as frequent, for the ungodly to follow one another on to their Lives End, with their Eyes cloſe ſhut, each in the moſt ſervile Reliance on what his Leader tells him; only with the ridiculous Addition of admiring moſt immoderately, all the Way, their own wonderful Freedom of Thought.

By ſuch Conſiderations as theſe, Men ſhould prepare their Minds for beginning to inquire. And when they do begin, it is an important Rule, not to be too haſty in drawing Concluſions, eſpecially bold ones. Viewing Things on every Side, obſerving how far Conſequences reach, and proceeding to collect and hear Evidence, till Reaſon ſaith there needs no more, is grievous Labour to Indolence and Impatience, and by no Means anſwers the Ends of Conceit and Affectation. A ſhorter Way therefore is commonly taken. Some Objection of minute Philoſophy ſtrikes their Thoughts unexpectedly, or comes recommended to them as highly faſhionable

onable: and whether a ſolid Anſwer can be given to it, they never aſk. Some Argument, urged in Favour of Religion, proves or ſeems to be a weak one: and, without more ado, they infer, that the reſt are no ſtronger. Some Things, which have been generally received, they find or apprehend are falſe or doubtful; and therefore Nothing, they imagine, is certain. Some Text of Scripture, poſſibly tranſcribed or tranſlated amiſs, is hard to defend, or to reconcile with ſome other; and therefore they ſlight the Whole. Some Doctrine, which Revelation is ſaid to teach, appears hard to underſtand or admit, or is capable of a ludicrous Turn: and therefore immediately they reject, not only that, but others not in the leaſt connected with it; throw aſide at once the intire Syſtem; and, it may be, plunge headlong into Vice. Yet, all the while, Revelation perhaps doth not teach this Doctrine, and they are offended ſolely at a Phantom of their own dreſſing up; or perhaps teaches it with great Reaſon, for any Thing which they can ever prove to the contrary. For in a Nature ſo unſearchable as that of God, and a Scheme ſo vaſt as that of his univerſal Government, there muſt be many Things, which Creatures of our limited Faculties cannot

approach towards comprehending; and, merely for Want of comprehending, may fancy to be full of Incredibilities, which, could we but know more, or would we but remember that we know ſo little, would inſtantly vaniſh. In Matters therefore, which we underſtand ſo very imperfectly, to ſet up human Imagination againſt divine Authority; to rely on crude Notions, that Things are impoſſible, which proper Teſtimony ſhews to be true in Fact; or that God cannot be, or do, what, by his own Declarations, he is, and hath done, betrays a Diſpoſition widely diſtant from the Modeſty which becomes us.

Beſides, were the Difficulties which attend the Syſtem of Religion, more conſiderable than they are; yet we ſhould take Notice, that Difficulties attend the contrary Syſtem alſo; and conſider, ſince one muſt be true, which is moſt likely to be ſo. If there be Objections againſt a Creation and a Providence; are there not greater againſt ſuppoſing, that the World could have exiſted without being created, or continue all this Time without a Providence? If there be ſomewhat ſcarce conceivable in the Doctrine of a future Life and Judgement: yet upon the Whole, which of the two is moſt probable, that a wiſe and good God will finally recompenſe

recompenſe Men according to their Works, or that he will not? If there be Things in the Goſpel-Revelation, for which it is hard to account, is it ſo hard to account for any Thing upon Earth, as how it ſhould come to have ſuch aſtoniſhing Proofs, internal and external, of being true, if it be really falſe? They who think the Creed of a Chriſtian ſo ſtrange and myſterious, let them think a while, what the Creed of an Infidel muſt be, if he would only lay aſide his general Pretences of Impoſture and Enthuſiaſm and Credulity and Bigotry, which thrown out at random will diſcredit all Evidence of Hiſtory alike; and anſwer in particular, how, on his own Hypotheſis, he accounts for all the ſeveral notorious Facts, on which our Religion is built. I am perſuaded, there hath never appeared yet amongſt Men ſo incomprehenſible a Collection of Tenets, as this would produce. Men may indeed be too eaſy of Belief: but it is juſt as great a Weakneſs to be too full of Suſpicion. Reverence for Antiquity may impoſe upon us: but Fondneſs for Novelty may do the ſame Thing. Undoubtedly we ſhould be on the Watch againſt pious Frauds: but againſt impious ones too. For whatever Diſhoneſty the Advocates of Religion have been

either juſtly or unjuſtly charged with, the Oppoſers of it have given full Proof, at leaſt of their Inclination not to come ſhort of them. Whoever therefore would proceed in the right Path, muſt be attentive to the Dangers on each Side.

Perhaps this may ſeem to require more Pains than moſt Perſons are capable of. But of an upright Diſpoſition every one is capable: and with this, common Abilities and Leiſure will ſuffice to judge concerning the neceſſary Points of Faith and Practice. Few indeed, or none, can judge of any Thing without relying in ſome Meaſure on the Knowledge and Veracity of others. And what muſt we think of human Nature, or what will become of human Society, if we can take Nothing on each other's Word? We ſhould hearken to no one indeed, who aſſerts plain Abſurdities. And we ſhould always judge for ourſelves as far as we can. But we ſhould not affect to do it farther. Where we viſibly want, either Parts or Learning or Time for it, as we frequently do in worldly Affairs of great Moment, no leſs than in Religion, we are both allowed and obliged to depend on others. Only we muſt obſerve theſe two Directions: that we firſt pay a due

Reſpect

Reſpect to that legal Authority, under which Providence hath placed us: and then chuſe, according to the beſt of our Underſtandings, the worthieſt and wiſeſt and moſt conſiderate Perſons to be our Conducters. For as we ſhould never haſtily run after uncommiſſioned Guides, ſo above all Things we ſhould beware of artful or ſelf-ſufficient, of raſh and impetuous ones: which laſt, however it happens, Men are peculiarly apt to follow, though almoſt ſure of being led by them, not only wrong, but great Lengths in what is wrong: whereas there are no plainer Rules of Behaviour than theſe, that in Proportion as we are in the Dark, we ſhould go on gently; and wherever there may be Hazard, keep on the ſafer Side.

He that will conduct himſelf thus, may ſoon make large Advances in religious Knowledge: and wherever he ſtops, needs not be uneaſy. Though the Arguments, which he hath for his Faith, may not be the ſtrongeſt: yet a *Tree*, but weakly rooted, often *brings forth good Fruit*; and if it doth, will never *be hewn down, and caſt into the Fire*[d]. Though he may be ignorant of many Things, and doubt or

[d] Matth. iii. 10. vii. 19.

even err concerning many others, yet they may be of ſmall Importance: or, though of great, yet having uſed a competent Care to inform himſelf, he will obtain Pardon. We cannot indeed ſay with Exactneſs, how much of their Time and Pains Men are bound to ſpend upon Examination, any more than how much of their Wealth in Works of Charity: and the leſs, as both Duties vary according to the Circumſtances of every Individual. But let each conſult his Conſcience, with a ſerious Deſire of being told the Truth, whether it hath been, and is now, his habitual Endeavour to determine and to act as rightly as he can: and, if the Anſwer be clearly in his Favour, when he is neither diſpoſed to frighten nor flatter himſelf, let him truſt in God, *and be at Peace*[e]. For *like as a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him*[f].

Not that, after all, it is indifferent, whether we fall into Errors concerning Religion, or eſcape them. For both Miſtakes and bare Ignorance, where they are accompanied with little or no Guilt, may often be followed by great Diſadvantages. Wrong Notions in the Underſtanding may produce wrong Movements

[e] Job. xxii. 21. [f] Pſal. ciii. 13.

in

in the Heart; which, even when they will not bring down upon us future Puniſhment, may unfit us for certain Degrees of future Reward. And, on the contrary, a larger Portion of Piety and Virtue, and therefore of heavenly Felicity, may prove to be the natural Conſequence of a more extenſive Acquaintance with Goſpel Truths. So that, in the Reaſon of Things, as well as the ſure Foundation of divine Promiſes, good Chriſtians are intitled to expect thoſe diſtinguiſhed Glories in a better World, for which, others, though, in Porportion to their Talents, truly good, may not be qualified.

But ſtill it is allowable to hope, and to rejoice in hoping, that a Being unſpeakably gracious will confer ſome Meaſure of Happineſs hereafter on all the Sons of Men, who have not made themſelves incapable of it; and that neither involuntary nor excuſable Miſapprehenſions will exclude any from it. If indeed, under Colour of reaſoning freely, Men will argue fallaciouſly, conclude precipitately, and behave preſumptuouſly; talk and do what they pleaſe without Modeſty or Fear; and ſet themſelves up, on this Merit, for the only Aſſertors of Liberty, when in Truth they are willing Slaves to a wicked Mind; theſe, of all Men,

have no Cloke for their Sin [g]. But the virtuous and humble Inquirer, who ſtudies to conduct his Underſtanding with impartial Care firſt, and his Life with inoffenſive Sincerity afterwards, yet, conſcious of his many Failings, begs for Pardon and Strength to be given him in ſuch Manner as his Maker ſees fit, may ſurely comfort himſelf with pleaſing Expectations of Acceptance after Death. *As many* therefore, *as walk according to this Rule, Peace be on them, and Mercy, and upon the Iſrael of God* [h].

[g] John xv. 22. [h] Gal. vi. 16.

SERMON II.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all Appearance of Evil.

THE first Duty of reasonable Creatures, with Respect to Religion, is, informing themselves, as fully as their natural Abilities, their Improvements in Knowledge, and their Condition of Life permit, concerning its Truth, and the Doctrines it teaches. Multitudes are unable to proceed far in this Inquiry: of the rest, some totally neglect it, some carry it on with less Care and Integrity, or fewer Advantages, than others. And hence it comes to pass, that different Persons think upon the Subject in very different Manners: and even the same Person, in Progress of Time, very differently from himself. But then every State of Mind, that Men can be in, relative to these Matters, hath its proper Obligations belonging to it: and, for Want of paying due

due Regard to them, they whoſe Opinions are right may be very bad in their Practice; and they whoſe Opinions are wrong, much worſe, than even their own Notions, by any juſt Conſequence, allow them to be. Not uncommonly indeed the Goodneſs of Mens Nature prevails, through God's Mercy, in ſome Points, over the ill Tendency of their Principles; and makes them better, than they profeſs themſelves. But much oftener they run into ſuch Behaviour, as muſt be unwarrantable, according to the very Doctrines, which they have embraced. And therefore every one ſhould conſider well, to what Sort of Conduct theſe really direct him, and from what they reſtrain him. Men may think, they could not help being of the Opinions they are: but if they take ſtill greater Liberties, than their Opinions lead them to; inſtead of ſuſpecting, that poſſibly they may lead them too far: this they muſt know to be their own Fault; and, while they indulge it, one doth not ſee, what they will ſtop at: whereas keeping carefully within the Bounds, which their Judgement ſets them, will be the beſt Excuſe they can have, in their preſent Way of thinking; and the likelieſt Means of diſcerning and amending the Errors of it.

Having

Having therefore laid before you, in the firſt Place, the Duty of *proving all Things*, and the general Diſpoſition of Mind, with which it ſhould be done: I proceed now to the conſequent Duty, of *holding faſt that which is good*, and *abſtaining from all Appearance of Evil*. And as the Appearances of Good and Evil muſt vary, according to the Notions, which are eſpouſed about them; it will be uſeful to conſider thoſe of Unbelievers, as well as Believers; for which Purpoſe, there muſt be ſome extraordinary Suppoſitions made: but I hope the truly pious will neither think them ſhocking, nor uſeleſs; being introduced only for the Sake of ſuggeſting to them ſuch Things, as though they want not for themſelves, or for others like them, they may perhaps employ to good Effect for convincing or ſilencing Infidels and Libertines, when Occaſion requires: and there hath ſeldom been more Occaſion, than at preſent.

To begin then with imagining a worſe Caſe, than perhaps is poſſible. Were any one perſuaded, not only that all Religion is groundleſs, but that Virtue and Vice, Right and Wrong, are mere Words without Meaning: yet even ſuch a one, if he did not think Wiſdom and Folly, Pleaſure and Pain, empty Sounds too;

would

would have ſome Rule of Conduct, ſo far as it reached. Still it would be Matter of ſerious Conſideration, what Behaviour promiſes the moſt Happineſs, upon the Whole, to ſuch Beings, placed in ſuch a World, as we are. And our preſent Intereſt here, had we no other Guide, far from permitting us to do every mad Thing, that Paſſion, Appetites or Fancies, prompt us to, would direct us, in a great Meaſure, to a Courſe of Honeſty, Friendlineſs and Sobriety. For not only Life and Health, and Safety and Quiet; of which no other Method can poſſibly give us, in general, near ſo good a Proſpect; are of much too high Importance, to be hazarded wantonly: but Reputation alſo is a Matter of no ſmall Value; and Peace within of greater ſtill. Now ſuppoſe there were no Reaſon in the leaſt for any one to feel Satisfaction in doing good-natured and juſt Things, or Uneaſineſs from the Reflection of having done cruel and baſe ones; yet, as in Fact, almoſt, if not abſolutely, all Perſons do feel both: to aim at the former, and avoid the latter, is, without Regard to Principle, a Dictate of common Prudence.

But farther, whatever ſome may think of moral Obligation themſelves, they have many

Reaſons to deſire, that the World about them ſhould think highly of it. For though Diſcretion, abſtracted from Senſe of Duty, might reaſonably, in moſt Caſes, reſtrain thoſe, with whom we are concerned, from uſing us ill; yet it will reſtrain them but in few Inſtances; and then very imperfectly. So that whoever is conſiderate, will be extremely unwilling to weaken the Bonds of human Society: which he will find, at beſt, are by no Means too ſtrong. And therefore, ſhould he think it his own Intereſt to be wicked; yet, if he be wiſe, he will never attempt to make one ſingle Perſon like him, beſides thoſe whom he abſolutely needs for Aſſociates: and even of ſuch he will beware: for he hath *taught them an evil Leſſon againſt himſelf*[a]. But ſpreading his Opinions farther, he will look on as the fillieſt of Vanities: and be earneſtly deſirous, that others ſhould act upon Principle, whatever he doth himſelf: that his Friends ſhould be faithful and affectionate, his Servants honeſt and careful, his Children dutiful and regular. And they, who, in the fancied Superiority of their Knowledge, teach thoſe about them, or thoſe with whom they converſe, to be profli-

[a] Eccluſ. ix. 1.

gate;

gate; by expreſſing, either deſignedly or careleſly, a Contempt of Virtue; well deſerve the Return, they often meet with, for ſuch Inſtructions.

Nay indeed every prudent Man, be his private Way of thinking ever ſo bad, will be ſolicitous to preſerve in the World, not only Morals; but, for the Sake of Morals, what is the main Support of them, Religion too: and that Religion, which is the likelieſt to ſupport them. Though he conceive it to be falſe, he will reſpect it as beneficial. Were he to imagine this or that Part of it hurtful; he would ſtill moderate his Zeal againſt them, ſo as not to deſtroy the Influence of the reſt. For if believing ſome Things may do Harm in the World, believing others may do Good. And if any Thing whatever can do much Good, and no Harm: it is the Perſuaſion, that we live continually under the Eye of an infinitely powerful and wiſe, juſt and good Ruler; who hath ſent us a Perſon of inconceivable Dignity, on Purpoſe to give us the fulleſt Aſſurance of his rewarding all, who ſhall repent and amend, and puniſhing all who continue in Wickedneſs, both here and to Eternity. To do or ſay what may weaken the

Im-

Impreſſions of ſuch a Doctrine, muſt, on all Suppoſitions, be the groſſeſt Folly. And yet ſome, who have the higheſt Opinion of their own Underſtandings, are perpetually guilty of it: and ſeem not to diſcern, how impoſſible it is, that the World ſhould ever be influenced, to any good Purpoſe, by what the daily Converſation and Example of thoſe, who are likely to be reckoned the more knowing Part of the World, encourage the reſt to deſpiſe.

But I dwell too long on the Suppoſition that Men can be abſolutely perſuaded, that Religion and Virtue are Nothing. For though many have wiſhed, and ſome ſaid it, when the Wickedneſs of their Lives hath driven them to that Refuge: and though others may have been led, by Love of Singularity, or Indignation againſt reigning Superſtitions, to advance the ſame Notion: yet neither their Numbers, nor their Abilities, have been comparatively at all conſiderable: and beſides, few of them appear to have thoroughly convinced themſelves, at leaſt for any Time, of what they affirmed: nor is there Pretence of Ground for ſuch Conviction to reſt on. Doubts indeed may be raiſed, ſuch as they are. And therefore let us conſider, in the ſecond Place, the

Obligations of those, who are doubtful about these Matters. Now Uncertainty, as it implies an Apprehension, that they may not be true; implies also an Apprehension, that they may. And the lowest Degree of Likelihood, the very Possibility, that God is, and that Virtue is his Law, should in all Reason have a powerful Influence on the Minds and Conduct of Men. Perhaps they fluctuate, only because they have not taken due Pains to inform themselves. They are ignorant; not Religion and Morals destitute of Proof; and instead of slighting, they should study them. Or supposing, after some Inquiry, that they cannot determine: this happens in many Cases, where further Inquiry affords full Evidence; concerning the main Point at least, if not every Particular. But were we to remain ever so much at a Loss, when we have done our best: not knowing Things to be true, is an exceedingly different State from knowing them to be false; how apt soever we are to confound the one with the other. In the Affairs of this World, Men may be quite in Suspence about Matters, which yet are very important Realities: and it may be of the utmost Consequence to them, whether, during that Suspence,

pence, they act rightly or not: nay, while it is ever so uncertain, what they are to think; it may be very clear, how they are to behave: and, by following or transgressing that Rule, they may as truly deserve well or ill, as by any other Part of their Conduct. Why then may not the Case be the same, in Respect to those, who have not arrived at Certainty concerning religious and moral Obligations? Why may not such Doubts be one Part of the Trial of their Behaviour; as well as other Perplexities are of the Behaviour of other Persons?

Being profane and vicious, because they do not see clearly, is determining, instead of doubting: and determining on the Side, that is not only prejudicial to all around them, but dangerous to themselves. For it is exceedingly little, were all Things well considered, that we can almost ever get by Wickedness: but what we may suffer by it, is infinite. The Fruits of it in this Life are usually found very bitter: nor is there any Shadow of Proof, but another may succeed it. And if there should; Innocence here cannot possibly hurt us hereafter: but Guilt runs a double Risque; not only as uneasy Reflections naturally follow it, but as farther Punishment may be justly inflicted

on it. The ſlighteſt Senſe of Duty, that we can experience, ſhould have made us at leaſt ſuſpect, that ſo peculiar a Feeling as that, is not to ſtand for Nothing in our Compoſition. And if Men will do, what they are told, by a ſecret Voice within, they ought not; it is fit they ſhould take the Conſequences, in the next World, as well as the preſent. For it is knowing they did ill, not knowing they ſhould be condemned for it, that makes their Condemnation juſt. And though acute and ſubtle Reaſoners may eaſily build up a ſpecious Syſtem of Doubts and Queſtions, yet this is a poor Defence to reſt the Whole of their Beings upon: eſpecially as Men have ſo irreſiſtible a Conviction, that Right and Wrong are Notions of great Conſequence, when their own Rights are invaded; that they cannot in earneſt think them idle Words, or Matters of Indifference, when their Neighbours are concerned; let them ſay what they will.

And therefore we may now go on to a third Suppoſition; that Men acknowledge the Obligation of Morals, but not of Religion; and let us conſider, what they are to do. They almoſt univerſally take the Liberty of doing one very bold and wrong Thing, of moſt extenſive bad

Effect.

Effect. They model their Notions of Morals, juſt according to their own Fancy; and reduce them into as narrow a Compaſs, as they think convenient. So that, while they talk very highly of Virtue, they practiſe little or nothing of it: or, if they obſerve ſome Duties ſtrictly, yet others, though, it may be, ſcarce of leſs Moment, but leſs agreeable to them, they neither regard, nor acknowledge, but hold them in utter Contempt. Thus one Part of the World tranſgreſſes the Rules of Sobriety and Chaſtity; another lives wholly to idle and expenſive Amuſements; a third is wickedly ſelfiſh or ill-natured in private Affairs; a fourth unreaſonably vehement in public ones; and yet all contrive to overlook their own Faults in theſe Points, and admire their own Goodneſs in others: whereas to be truly good, we muſt be ſo in every Thing alike. But Inclination eaſily prevails over Principle, where it hath not the Sanction of Religion to ſtrengthen it. And they, who profeſs Nothing beyond Morals, not only are deſtitute of that higher Aid; but, though their Lives fully ſhew how much they want it, very commonly affect a Scorn of it, no Way to be accounted for. Suppoſe them doubtful even

about natural Religion; they muſt own, that, could it be proved, Nothing in the World could influence Men to Virtue, like it. The Fear of Puniſhment, the Hope of Reward, from the King and Lord of all, the Conſciouſneſs of living continually in his Preſence, Reverence of his perfect Holineſs, Love of his infinite Goodneſs, Reliance on his infinite Wiſdom and Power, are evidently the ſtrongeſt Motives to right Behaviour in every Station, that can be propoſed. They muſt own too, that the moſt thoughtful and able Men in all Ages, have held theſe Motives to be well grounded; that the Proofs in Favour of them have conſiderable Appearances of being concluſive: and, had they none, it would furniſh no Cauſe of Triumph, but of the deepeſt Concern to every Lover of Virtue. Such a one therefore, however uncertain, will abhor the Thought of treating ſo beneficial, ſo reſpectable a Doctrine with Contempt and Ridicule: a ſhocking Manner, which frivolous and wrong Minds are ſtrangely fond of, on many unfit Occaſions: and indulging it, throughly miſleads them from good Senſe and diſcreet Conduct, in every other Article of Life, as well as this. On the contrary, the ſlighteſt Apprehenſion, that there only

only may be a juſt Ruler and Judge of the World, will give every well-diſpoſed Perſon great Serioufneſs of Heart in thinking upon theſe Subjects, and great Decency in ſpeaking of them: will incline him to ſeek for, and pay Regard to, any Degree of farther Evidence concerning them, that is real, though perhaps it falls very ſhort of what he could wiſh: and will engage him, in the mean Time, to behave with all the Caution, that becomes his preſent Situation. For, in a Caſe of ſuch Importance, even ſmall Suſpicions ought to lay us under no ſmall Reſtraints. Therefore he will let Nothing ever eſcape him, which may induce others to throw off what he only doubts of: he will never ſolicit them to tranſgreſs the Precepts of Religion, while they acknowledge its Authority: (Things palpably wicked, and yet commonly done:) he will much more diſcourage a groundleſs Neglect, than a groundleſs Belief and Practice, of it: and he will think himſelf bound to act thus, not in Prudence only, as even Men of no Principle are, but in Conſcience alſo.

Theſe then are the Duties of ſuch, if any ſuch there be, as admit the Reality of Virtue, and are doubtful concerning any Thing farther.

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But indeed the Generality of Men profeſs to go ſo much farther, as to believe in natural Religion, whatever they may think of Chriſtianity. Let us therefore conſider, in the fourth Place, what their Obligations are. And we ſhall find an Addition of very conſiderable ones incumbent on them, if they deſerve the Title they aſſume, that of Deiſts: in which Word, according to its original Import, Regard to the Deity is principally, if not ſolely, expreſſed. But notwithſtanding this, it hath now for a long Time ſignified much more determinately that Men do not believe in Chriſt, than that they do believe in God. At leaſt, the Belief of ſome, who would take it exceedingly ill to be called by a worſe Name, amounts to little more, than a general confuſed Perſuaſion of ſome Sort of firſt Cauſe; probably an intelligent, perhaps a beneficent one too: but with ſcarce any diſtinct Conception of his being the moral Governor of the World; much leſs any ſerious Conviction, that he expects from us a Temper and Conduct of Piety and Virtue, as the only Condition and Means of our obtaining Happineſs and avoiding Miſery. Now if their Faith comes ſhort of this, they may very nearly as well have none at all: and if it comes up to

this, it binds them indiſpenſably to be very different in their Practice, from what they too commonly are: to cultivate in their Hearts that Fear and Love, which the Greatneſs and the Goodneſs of God require: to pay him outwardly that Homage and Worſhip, which our compound Frame and the Intereſts of Society call for: to beg of him both Light to diſcern Truth, and Strength to practiſe it: to make diligent and upright Inquiry, what Rules he hath pointed out for the Conduct of Man: to obſerve them all with the ſtricteſt Care, however contrary to favourite Inclinations: and to endeavour, as far as their Influence reaches, that others alſo may feel and expreſs the ſame deep Senſe of what they owe their Maker. Theſe are evident Duties of real Believers in him: do they perform them? They talk in the higheſt Terms of the Sufficiency of Reaſon, and the Clearneſs with which natural Light teaches every Thing needful: doth it *teach them to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly*[b]? It is but too eaſy for them to excell, in this Reſpect, the Generality of ſuch, as claim the Title of Chriſtians. Why will they not take ſo honourable a Method of putting us, and our Profeſſion, out of Countenance? They apprehend

[b] Tit. ii. 12.

themſelves perhaps to have been far more ſtrict and careful than we, in forming their Opinions: why will they not manifeſt a proportionable Strictneſs in regulating their Practice too? That would be a powerful Evidence, both to the World and their own Hearts, that they are ſincere in their Pretenſions: that they do not reject the Doctrines of the Goſpel, merely to be excuſed from the Duties of it: nor diſown every other Law of Life, but one within them, that they may be tied to Nothing, which they do not like. It would be uncharitable indeed to accuſe them of this, without Proof: but they would do well to examine, whether they are not guilty of it. For it is a dangerous Temptation: and one Thing looks peculiarly ſuſpicious in many of them; that they have ſo little or no Zeal for natural Religion, and ſo vehement a Zeal againſt revealed. Surely every one, who inwardly honours God, muſt be affected quite otherwiſe: and think both his Conſcience and his Character concerned in ſhewing the warmeſt Attachment to the former, and the mildeſt Equity in Relation to the latter. If he not only ſuſpected, but imagined he knew the Scripture-Scheme to be falſe, ſtill he muſt own it to be a Falſehood with the moſt amazing Quantity of

Truth

Truth in it, that ever was: to give Men, however it happens, beyond Compariſon, the righteſt Notions, the juſteſt Precepts, the joyfulleſt Encouragement, both in Piety and Morals, that ever Syſtem did: and to have been *the Light of the World*[c], ſo far as appears, from the very Beginning of it. Our only Knowledge of the Exiſtence of true Religion in the earlieſt Times, is from the Diſcoveries recorded in the Bible, as made to the Patriarchs. The Jewiſh Diſpenſation afterwards was for many Ages the main Bulwark of Faith *in one God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth:* nor probably was it from any other Source, that the learned Heathens derived their chief Acquaintance with divine Truths, after they had forgotten the primitive Tradition of them. Then laſtly, the Chriſtian Revelation overturned, when every Thing elſe had appeared incapable of doing it, Polytheiſm and Idolatry, immoral Superſtition and profligate Vice, wherever it was preached: and though it was indeed perverted for a Time to patronize, in ſome Degree, what it had deſtroyed; yet, by the native Goodneſs of its Conſtitution, it recovered again; and is now profeſſed by the Church, of which we are Members, in

[c] John viii. 12.

greater

greater Purity, than elſewhere upon Earth, Infidels themſelves being Judges. If therefore they have in Truth the Affection, which they cannot deny but they ought to have, for genuine, moral, rational Piety, they muſt honour this Inſtitution, as an infinitely beneficial one; whether they confeſs it to be from Heaven, or not: and, before they even wiſh it diſregarded, ſhould conſider, with no little Serioufneſs, what Effects muſt naturally follow. Would Men really believe the Being and Providence of God, the Obligations of Virtue, and the Recompences of another Life, the more firmly, for diſbelieving the Goſpel? Would they underſtand their Duty the better, for having no written Rule of it? Would they judge about it the more impartially, for being left to make it out by their own Fancies? Would they think of it the oftener, for never being inſtructed in it? Or is there not the ſtrongeſt Appearance, that as from Chriſtianity all the true Knowledge of Religion came, which even the Enemies of Chriſtianity have to boaſt of: ſo with it, all true Regard to Religion would be loſt again? We have been making in the preſent Age ſome Trial of this: and the Effects, in private Life and public, have been ſuch, that it is very hard to ſay, why either a good

good or a wiſe Man ſhould ever want to ſee, what a farther Trial would end in. But, at leaſt, ſuch a one would have much more Concern that Men ſhould believe and practiſe what Reaſon and Nature teach, than that they ſhould not believe and practiſe what Revelation teaches. And even if he could think himſelf obliged to declare againſt the latter, be the Conſequences bad as they will, for the Sake of what he imagines Truth; (which yet Unbelievers are not apt to conſider as a Point of ſuch indiſpenſable Obligation, in other Caſes;) he would however do it in a fair, an honourable, a decent Manner: never miſrepreſent, through Deſign or Negligence, the Doctrines, the Evidence, or the Teachers, of the Goſpel; never ſtudy to expoſe them to the Hatred of Men by Invectives, or to their Contempt by Ridicule: but inform himſelf about them with Care, judge of them with Candour, and ſpeak of them with good Breeding and Moderation. Widely different from this, is the Conduct of our Adverſaries; who take all Methods without Scruple to engage on their Side, the Reſentments of ſome, the Avarice of others, the Vanity of a third Sort, the Senſuality of a fourth: and notwithſtanding,

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are able, it ſeems, to paſs themſelves upon unwary Minds for great Lovers of free Inquiry: but, with a little Attention, *by their Fruits ye ſhall know them*[d]. Would God they were cool and ſerious enough to know themſelves; and to remember, that neither Doubt nor Diſbelief can ever excuſe Malice or Diſhoneſty. Could they but bring their Hearts into ſuch a Diſpoſition, their Objections would ſoon diminiſh, and our Anſwers and Arguments appear juſt and concluſive. To be ſatisfied of this, let us take a ſhort View of the Caſe of Chriſtianity.

God may certainly inform Men of moſt uſeful Things, which they did not, and could not, elſe know. He may certainly beſtow ſuperior Advantages on ſome Ages and Nations from Motives of which we are ignorant, yet be ſufficiently gracious to all. He may ſee Cauſe to reveal ſome Things to us very imperfectly, and yet require us to believe what he hath revealed, though we are unable to comprehend what he hath not. He may give us Commands, without adding the Reaſons of them, which yet we are bound to obey: for we ourſelves do the ſame Thing. He may appoint various Forms of Religion, ſuited

[d] Matth. vii. 16.

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to various Places and Times, full as properly as Men appoint various Forms of Government. Farther ſtill, he might as juſtly permit us to become what we are, frail and mortal, by Means of our firſt Parents Tranſgreſſion, as create us what we are, independently upon it. He is no leſs merciful in pardoning our Sins on Account of the willing Sacrifice, which he hath provided for us, than if he had pardoned them without any at all. He is no leſs authorized to demand of us what he will give us Power to perform, if we aſk it aright; than what we had Power to perform of ourſelves. And he can as eaſily form our Bodies anew, fitted for the Purpoſes of a better Life, as he could form them originally, fitted for the Purpoſes of this. If ſome Parts of his Word appear hard to be underſtood, of ſmall Uſe, or even hurtful; many Parts of his Works appear ſo too. If the Revelation, which he hath given us, hath often done Harm inſtead of Good: the Reaſon and the Affections which he hath given us, have done ſo likewiſe. Theſe few Conſiderations, (and there are many obvious ones beſides, of the ſame Kind,) would remove out of every honeſt Mind moſt of the Prejudices raiſed againſt the

Faith

Faith of Chriſtians: which indeed, for the greateſt Part, bear full as hard againſt the univerſal Providence of God, even againſt thoſe Proceedings of it, which we daily experience.

Then as to the Evidence in Favour of our Religion: whatever Difficulties may be ſtarted concerning particular Points of it, taken ſingly; as there may, in the ſame Manner, concerning any Evidence in the World; yet lay together, in one View, the Scripture-Narration of Things from the Beginning; the Conſiſtency and Connection of the Scheme, though carried on for ſo many thouſands of Years; the admirable Temper and Character of the Author of Chriſtianity; the Sublimity and Reaſonableneſs of its Doctrines; the Purity and Benevolence of its Precepts; the Excellency of its Means of Improvement and Grace; the eternal and true Felicity of its Rewards; the manifold Atteſtations of its Hiſtory and Miracles; the wonderful Propagation of it through the World, and its primitive Influence on the Souls and Lives of Men; the undeniable Completion of many of its Prophecies, and the evident Room there is left for the fulfilling of the reſt: all theſe notorious Facts, thus united

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and combined, can ſurely never fail to convince every impartial Examiner, that the Syſtem, they ſupport, muſt be from God, and that the ſupreme Happineſs of Man is to ſhare in its Bleſſings. Now the weakeſt Degree of ſuch a Perſuaſion, far from being unworthy of Regard, becauſe it is no ſtronger, ought in all Juſtice to produce a moſt inquiſitive Attention to further Proof; and, in the mean Time, a conſcientious Practice of what already appears credible. For, though any one's Belief exceed his Doubts but a little; yet, if it doth ſo at all, what prevails in his Mind ought to regulate his Conduct: and acting thus, he will ſoon experience his Faith to increaſe. Setting himſelf to keep the Commandments, will ſhew him clearly his Want of the Mercies acknowledged in the Creed: and labouring to behave ſuitably to his preſent Light, will intitle him to that gracious Promiſe of more, given by our bleſſed Lord: *If any Man will do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*[e].

The further and particular Obligations of thoſe, who have acquired this Knowledge, and are eſtabliſhed in the Goſpel-Faith, muſt

[e] John vii. 17.

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be the Subject of another Diſcourſe. But the general Direction for ſuch as are weak and leſs advanced, is undoubtedly that of the Apoſtle: *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the ſame Rule, let us mind the ſame Thing: and, if in any Thing ye be otherwiſe minded, God will reveal even this unto you*[f].

[f] Phil. iii. 16. 15.

SER-

SERMON III.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things: hold faſt that which is good: abſtain from all Appearance of Evil.

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words, I have laid before you the Duty of carefully conſidering our Obligations, in Reſpect of Piety and Morals: and acting ſuitably to our Convictions, on thoſe Heads. According as our Notions of either vary, whether from our different Means of Knowledge, or different Uſe of them, it muſt be expected, that our Conduct ſhould vary too. And yet I have ſhewn you, that, were it poſſible for Men to diſbelieve the Authority both of Religion and Virtue, mere Prudence and Self-intereſt would put them under conſiderable Reſtraints, in Relation to each: that whoever only doubts concerning them, admits they may be true; and therefore ſhould

take the acknowledged ſafer Side: that any Degree of Perſuaſion, in Favour of Virtue only, much more of natural Religion too, ſhould excite a proportionably ſerious Regard to it: and that the loweſt Apprehenſion of the Truth of Chriſtianity, (which, I hope I proved to you, though briefly, hath the cleareſt Marks of Truth upon it) greatly ſtrengthens every other Tie; and farther binds Men to inform themſelves fully about it, as ſoon as poſſible; and give it reſpectful Treatment in the mean Time.

If then even theſe Perſons are to behave thus, how are we to behave? The Doubter, nay the Infidel, is obliged to no ſmall Care of his Heart and Life: what is the Believer obliged to? We pride ourſelves on being ſuch: pity or deteſt thoſe who are not: and yet, all the while, Chriſtians who think and act otherwiſe than Chriſtians ought, may deſerve full as ill, perhaps much worſe, than they: indeed may be one chief Cauſe, that they are what they are. Leaving others therefore to the Judge of all; let us at preſent think of ourſelves: conſider, what Manner of Perſons our holy Profeſſion requires us to be; and whether we ſo obſerve its Rules, that we may juſtly

hope to attain its End: escape *the Wrath to come*[a], and *partake of the Glory that shall be revealed*[b]. Now it plainly requires,

1. That we be duly affected by the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity. Many that profess it, and are persuaded of its Authority, seem to have no Notion almost of its Value, or of any great Regard owing to it. They say, it is designed intirely to make Men live good Lives: and accordingly if they do but live what the World calls a good Life, the Design is answered. As for Matters of mere Faith, or even of Practice beyond this, they conceive there is little Need of being concerned about them: and thus they are very good Christians in their own Opinions, with scarce any Thing to distinguish them from good, or perhaps even from indifferent, Heathens. In this Error, the artful Enemies of the Gospel studiously confirm its inconsiderate Friends. For thus, pretending by no Means to oppose it, but only to rectify Mens Notions about it; and making loud Complaints, if they are suspected of any Thing worse; they can destroy, where they gain Credit, the whole Effect of what it adds to the Religion of Nature: and induce the un-

[a] Matth. iii. 7. Luke iii. 7. [b] 1 Pet. v. 1.

wary to imagine, there is Nothing in it, worth contending for, beſides *thoſe practical, ſocial, and real Duties*, as they are pleaſed, by Way of Diſtinction, to call them, *which our Reaſon and Senſes preſcribe in common to us all*; and which therefore we may learn and obſerve as well, without as with the Bible; where they lie mixed with many other Things, uſeleſs, if not hurtful; and are either miſrepreſented by the Writers themſelves, or very liable to be miſtaken by us. But indeed, if the very Writers of Scripture, with the Spirit of God to aſſiſt them, miſunderſtood the Doctrines of Revelation; he both choſe and guided them extremely ill; nor have we any poſſible Means of underſtanding thoſe Doctrines now. And if either they or we underſtand them at all; our Maker expects from us the Belief of many Things undiſcoverable by Reaſon, as Points of great Conſequence to our eternal Well-being; as with good Cauſe he may. The Knowledge of our fallen Eſtate ſhews us our original Deſtination, and our preſent Need of Help from above. The Incarnation and Death of God's eternal Son could not be appointed by him for Purpoſes of ſmall Importance: and his Word acquaints us, that Bleſſings of the higheſt

Im-

Importance depend on what he hath done and ſuffered for us: on his Atonement and Mediation, our Title to Pardon of Sin; on the Grace of the Holy Ghoſt whom he ſent, our Ability of performing acceptable Obedience; on both, our Reſurrection to eternal Life; on our Belief of theſe Things, our Intereſt in them. If then the Goſpel be true, its peculiar Doctrines are of the utmoſt Moment: and the Duties grounded on them, which we owe to God, as the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; to his Son, as our Redeemer; to his bleſſed Spirit, as our Sanctifier; are both as real, and as weighty, as any poſſibly can be; fully equal in their Obligation, and ſuperior in their Rank, to the moſt valuable ones of human Society. They therefore who neglect them, lead very wicked, inſtead of good Lives: and they who eſteem them lowly, diſhonour the Author of them. It is true, Reaſon cannot prove them: but it doth not contradict them. They are taught in Scripture only: but they are taught there by the all-wiſe God: and he cannot have left us at Liberty to model his Revelations according to our own Fancies; admit Part, and reject Part: but we are to take the whole Plan of our Salvation, as he hath delivered it: believe it, though im-

plicitly; and reſpect it, in Proportion to the Streſs laid upon it by him, who muſt know. This will naturally diſpoſe us,

2. To perform the next Obligation incumbent on us: paying a due Regard to the peculiar Inſtitutions of Chriſtianity. Great Numbers appear to have ſome how perſuaded themſelves, that ſeveral Things, which they muſt acknowledge their Maker hath appointed, as the ordinary Means of heavenly Grace and ſpiritual Improvement, may notwithſtanding, nearly, if not quite, as well, be let alone. Baptiſm indeed they do practiſe: but with plain Marks of conſidering it, as a mere empty Ceremony; not, as our Saviour hath declared it [c], the expreſs and original Condition of our Claim to all the Mercies of the Goſpel-Covenant. Laying on of Hands in Confirmation, after proper Inſtruction and a perſonal Engagement to live piouſly and virtuouſly, though evidently a very affecting and uſeful Rite, and reckoned, in the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, amongſt *the Principles of the Doctrine of Chriſt* [d]; is yet deſired, in Proportion, but by few. Receiving the holy Euchariſt, though a Duty of all Chriſtians, enjoined by our bleſſed Redeemer, al-

[c] Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 5. [d] Heb. vi. 1, 2.

moſt

moſt with his dying Words, and declared by St. *Paul* to be *the Communion of his Body and Blood*[c], that is, a Participation of the Benefits of his Death; is yet, I fear, entirely omitted by moſt, practiſed by many of the reſt, very ſeldom; and by ſome from very improper Motives: and ſuch Reaſons are pleaded for the Neglect, as have either no Weight at all, or equal Weight againſt the Hope of future Happineſs. Praying to God is a Dictate of natural, as well as revealed Religion. And yet were a great Part of you here preſent queſtioned, how conſtantly you pray in private, indeed when you prayed laſt, and whether you are careful to do it with Attention and Seriouſneſs, or look on it only as a Matter of Courſe; what Anſwer muſt you give? And as for public Worſhip: how many are there, who yet call themſelves Chriſtians, that hardly ever attend it? And how do many others think and ſpeak of it? Perhaps as Matter of Curioſity and Amuſement. If they can hope for an entertaining Diſcourſe after it, they will condeſcend to come and do Homage to him, that made them, or ſeem to do it: otherwiſe they will not. Or perhaps they vouchſafe to attend it as Mat-

[c] 1 Cor. x. 16.

ter of decent Example and Propriety. Accordingly in ſome Places they always go to Church; in others, never: forgetting, that the latter will be known, and will influence, full as much as the former. Or the leaſt Trifle in the World ſhall determine them, ſometimes the one Way, ſometimes the other. And both doing and omitting it they talk of, in an eaſy, gay Manner, as a Thing of no Conſequence at all. Nay, too often, it is directly pleaded, that they can ſpend their Time as well, or much better, another Way: for they know beforehand every Thing that is told them here. Now, not to inquire particularly, in what better Things, that they could not find Leiſure for elſe, thoſe Perſons actually ſpend the Time of divine Service, who tell us ſo frankly they can: poſſibly they may, ſome of them, a little overrate their Knowledge: at leaſt, they frequently ſeem to have great Need of being reminded, if not taught: and had they none, another and higher Duty, for which we meet, is Prayer. But to this, and all other Acts of Devotion, they object, that true Devotion is in the Heart; and outward Shew is Nothing material. Why, ſo is true Loyalty, true Friendſhip, every true Virtue. But are we therefore bound to give

no external Demonſtration of them? At that Rate, what would they be worth, and how long would they laſt? God indeed doth not want ſuch Demonſtrations: but we want them, to keep alive our Senſe of Duty to him: the World around us wants them, to ſpread a like Senſe amongſt others: and, were the Benefits of his Inſtitutions much leſs evident than they are; ſtill they are his, and we may be ſure he hath Reaſon for them. A good Subject will go beyond, rather than come ſhort of, what the Laws require, in paying Honour to his Prince. A penitent Criminal will not fail to ſue out and plead his Pardon in due Form, let Forms, in themſelves, be Things ever ſo inſignificant: if he did, purpoſely or negligently, he would well deſerve to forfeit it. Every Man of common Prudence, on whom, or his Family, any Thing valuable is beſtowed on certain Conditions, will think it of Conſequence, to qualify himſelf, or them, according to thoſe Conditions, whether he ſees the particular Uſe of them or not. If then we think ſuch Behaviour neceſſary in all temporal Concerns, why not in ſpiritual? God is our King, and hath preſcribed to us the Manner of doing him Homage. He is our Judge,

Judge, and hath directed us to the Method of eſcaping Puniſhment. He is our gracious Benefactor, and hath notified to us the Means of obtaining his Favours. Why ſhall any one Thing, thus ordered by him, and therefore undoubtedly ordered in Wiſdom, be either omitted, or obſerved with Contempt? Surely this is by no Means the Spirit, with which Sinners ought to receive a Tender of Forgiveneſs; and Mortals, of eternal Life. The Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* directs the firſt Chriſtians, even in the Midſt of Perſecution, *not to forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together*, which comprehends every public Office of Religion; and laments, that *the Manner of ſome was* to do otherwiſe [f]. How guilty then muſt they be, who are now of this Number; or put on the Appearance of deſpiſing the Ordinances of Chriſt, at the ſame Time that they uſe them; and, though really, to ſome Degree, ſerious in them, are afraid of being thought ſo! But this leads me,

3. To a farther Obligation we are under, which is to profeſs our Regard, both for the Doctrines and the Inſtitutions of the Goſpel, openly and boldly, on all fit Occaſions. It is a Reproach, I believe, peculiar to the Chriſtians

[f] Heb. x. 25.

of

of this Age and Nation, that many of them ſeem aſhamed of their Chriſtianity: would not perhaps be ſaid to have thrown it aſide, yet would by no Means be imagined much in earneſt about it: and therefore ſtudy, if poſſible, to conceal their Way of thinking: or, when they are attacked upon it, excuſe their Piety, as others do their Vices, with a Sort of laughing half Defence; and ſhift off the Subject, as well and as ſoon as they can. A moſt aſtoniſhing Treatment of what our eternal Happineſs depends on: eſpecially when our Saviour expreſsly requires us to *confeſs him before Men*, as ever we expect, that he ſhould *confeſs us before his Father, which is in Heaven*[g]. It is not meant, that we ſhould be affectedly forward in talking of our Religion; but, whenever we are called to do ſo, unaffectedly own it, and ſtand by it. In ſuch a Caſe, Diſſimulation, or even Reſerve, is a mean-ſpirited Deſertion of the worthieſt Cauſe in the World: and the Words of the holy Jeſus on another Occaſion are juſtly applicable to this, that *he, who is not for him, is againſt him*[h]. Whoever is unwilling to be taken for a pious and good Man, runs a great Riſque of ſoon becoming a profane and bad one. Open

[g] Matth. x. 32. [h] Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

Profeſſion

Profeſſion would have reſtrained him from doing wrong, and others from tempting him: whereas a timorous Concealment expoſes him both Ways. At leaſt, it gives the irreligious a Pretence for ſaying and imagining, either that every one thinks as they do, or that no one can defend thinking otherwiſe: and deprives thoſe, who are better diſpoſed, of a very animating and needful Support. For no Inticement to neglect our Duty is ſo dangerous, as the Appearance of a general Neglect: nor any Perſecution ſo effectual, as that of public Scorn. Therefore we ſhould combine to ſhelter one another from it: declare frankly and with Spirit, in our private Converſation, as well as by our Attendance here, what Side we are of: not be afraid of a little, perhaps only ſeeming, Contempt from thoſe, who are the juſteſt Objects of Pity themſelves; but be willing to *ſuffer* the *Affliction* of Shame, amongſt others, if it muſt be ſo, *with the People of God*[1]: the Number of whom is not yet become ſo ſmall, or ſo deſtitute of able Advocates, but that, would they unite for that End, they might abundantly keep each other in Countenance, and their Adverſaries in Awe. We have every poſſible Reaſon to be zealous in our

[1] Heb. xi. 25.

Cauſe.

Cauſe. Unbelievers have no ſingle good one to be ſo in theirs. Yet they are active, and we are remiſs: and what will this end in, unleſs we change our Conduct? But then if we do, there is a

4th, Moſt important Obligation incumbent on us, that of tempering our Zeal with Mildneſs and Charity. We ought indeed to *contend earneſtly for the Faith*[k], whenever it is oppoſed: but in a Manner worthy of it. Cruel Actions, opprobrious Words, inward ill Will, unjuſt bad Opinion, are abſolutely forbidden us, even towards the Enemies of the Goſpel: and upon the Whole, we do treat them with a Moderation, which they are far from imitating. But ſtill more gentle ſhould we be to ſuch, as believe Chriſtianity, but only miſunderſtand it: eſpecially conſidering, that we are juſt as liable to miſtake, as they. And it is a melancholy Conſideration, that whilſt one Part of thoſe, who profeſs our Religion, are ſo cool about its general and eſſential Intereſts; moſt of the other are ſo immoderately warm about their own particular Syſtems and Perſuaſions. Not only the Maintainers of eſtabliſhed Opinions are apt to judge hardly of the rigid Oppoſers of them, and

[k] Jude 3.

they

they to return it: but many, of greater Latitude, cry out for Liberty to themſelves, though they enjoy it to the full, with a Spirit of Perſecution: and whilſt they claim an unbounded Allowance for every new Notion, will give none to thoſe, who retain the old; but throw Imputations or Contempt upon them, without Equity or Mercy. What can be the Conſequence of this, but what we experience: that the bitter Things which we ſay of one another, Unbelievers, with ſeemingly good Reaſon, will ſay after us: and when we have taught them to condemn the ſeveral Sorts of Chriſtians, and eſpecially their Teachers, as the worſt of Men, will, by a very plauſible Inference, condemn Chriſtianity, as the worſt of Religions? How zealouſly ſoever therefore contending Parties may *hold faſt* what they profeſs: yet, violating the moſt indiſputable Duties by their Vehemence for diſputable Doctrines, they provoke great Numbers to ſit looſe to all Profeſſion; and do incredible Harm to the Religion, which they would ſerve. For, let us try what Methods we will, Nothing can ever ſo effectually promote true Faith, as joining to practiſe true Charity. But however unanimous Chriſtians may be in other Reſpects, they will neither do Honour to the Goſpel, nor receive

receive Benefit from it, unleſs they are alſo careful,

5. To be ſeriouſly and uniformly pious and virtuous. Yet, moſt unhappily, whatever elſe we differ in, we agree but too well in neglecting this. Multitudes call themſelves Chriſtians, who ſeem never to have thought of any Care of their Conduct; but make a ſolemn Profeſſion of the pureſt and holieſt Religion, that ever was; and at the ſame Time, throughout their Lives, do every Thing that they are inclined to, and Nothing elſe. Others that will obſerve ſome Reſtraints, would find, upon a fair Examination, that they follow their Paſſions, perhaps in as many or more Caſes, than their Principles; or, which comes to the ſame Thing, accommodate their Principles to ſuit their Paſſions. And even they, who have little of any bad Inclination to lead them wrong, are very frequently led almoſt as wrong by indolent Compliance with bad Cuſtom. For from whence is it, that the Generality of Men form their Rule of Behaviour? Not from Scripture, or from Reaſon: but from Faſhion and common Practice: whatever they find People of tolerable Reputation do, that they do likewiſe. When a farther Step of wrong Indulgence is publicly taken, they proceed

ceed to take the ſame; or, it may be, one ſomewhat leſs: the Duties, which others throw off intirely, they practiſe rarely, and with Indifference: the Liberties, which others indulge without Reſerve, they approach towards with Heſitation and by Degrees: but as the World goes on from bad to worſe, they go on too; and imagine they are perfectly ſafe, becauſe they are a little behind. Now Men ſhould not indeed be ſuperſtitiouſly ſcrupulous: but they ſhould be conſcientiouſly attentive to their Hearts and Lives; and reflect what ought to be done, as well as obſerve what is done. The Goſpel forbids, inſtead of recommending, *Conformity to the World*[l]: by no Means with an Intention, that we ſhould be ſingular in Matters of Indifference, but reſolute againſt Compliances unlawful or dangerous. Chriſtians, far from being permitted to follow others into Sin, are deſigned to lead them into Piety and Virtue: to be *the Light, the Salt of the Earth*[m]: not to ſet an Example of uſeleſs Rigour, much leſs of uncharitable Cenſoriouſneſs; but of punctual and impartial Adherence to every Rule, which God hath appointed by Reaſon or Scripture, and faithful Endeavours to attain the great End of his Appoint-

[l] Rom. xii. 2. [m] Matth. v. 13, 14.

ments:

ments: for without that, the exacteſt outward Regularity is empty Form. *Now the End of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure Heart and of a good Conſcience, and of Faith unfeigned*[n]: a ſincere Spirit of Love and Reverence towards our Maker, our Redeemer and Sanctifier; of Juſtice and Goodneſs to our Fellow-Creatures, of Reaſonableneſs and Moderation, with Reſpect to the Advantages and Enjoyments of the preſent Life; for in theſe Things conſiſts our Fitneſs for a better. This then is the real Temper of Chriſtianity. And if we have either never felt it, or perceive ourſelves declining and deviating from it; our Hearts growing fond of worldly Objects, and ſinking down into that ſupine Diſregard to God and our Duty, and a Judgement to come, which is undeniably the prevailing, and likely to be the fatal, Diſtemper of the preſent Age: our Caſe and our Remedy are plainly laid down in that awful Exhortation to the Church of *Sardis: I know thy Works: that thou haſt a Name that thou liveſt, and art dead. Be watchful; and ſtrengthen the Things which remain, that are ready to die.—Remember, how thou haſt received and heard; and hold faſt, and repent. If thou ſhalt not watch, I will come*

[n] 1 Tim. i. 5.

on thee as a Thief; and thou ſhalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee[o]. But then to do this effectually, we muſt obey the whole Injunction of the Text: and not only *hold faſt that which is* evidently *good*, but,

6. and laſtly, *Abſtain from all Appearance of Evil.* It might be tranſlated, from every Kind of Evil. But even then, the Senſe would be much the ſame. For though doing what we know to be wrong is a groſſer Kind of Wickedneſs: yet doing what appears to us wrong, though we are not ſure of it, is a real Kind: and, even were we abſolutely doubtful, ſtill, if taking one Courſe may be acting amiſs, and taking the contrary cannot; the general Rule certainly is, to lean always towards the ſecurer Side: for why ſhould we run into Danger needleſsly? And yet what Numbers of miſerable Creatures are there, whom the Obſervance of this one Direction would have made happy: who ſaw the ſafe Path, but would prefer the pleaſing one; exulted in it for a while, then were enſnared of a ſudden, and loſt perhaps for ever! Nor is it Pleaſure only, but Intereſt, Power, Vanity, Reſentment, every Thing within us and around us, in its Turn, that may en-

[o] Rev. iii. 1, 2, 3.

danger

danger our Innocence, by tempting us to venture upon what we hope, but are not ſatisfied, is lawful. *Go not* therefore *in a Way, wherein thou mayeſt fall: be not confident in a plain Way* [p]. Even ſuch Actions, as appear to us very allowable, yet, if they appear evil to others, it is, ordinarily ſpeaking, both our Prudence and our Duty to abſtain from, as much as, with tolerable Convenience, we can. Whatever indeed, on mature Conſideration, we are fully perſuaded we ought to do, that we muſt do, let the World think as it will. But where we apprehend a Thing to be only permitted: if the wiſe will diſapprove it, or the injudicious miſinterpret it; if the good will be afflicted, or the bad rejoice at it; if rigid and warm Tempers will be guilty of cenſuring us for it raſhly; or eaſy and complying ones follow us in it, againſt their Judgements; if our taking harmleſs Liberties will encourage others to take ſinful ones: in ſhort, if any how, by doing what otherwiſe we might, we ſhall induce any one elſe to do what he ought not: the great Law of Chriſtian Charity requires, *that no Man put a Stumbling-block*, or *Occaſion to fall, in his Brother's Way*; or do any Thing, whereby he *is grieved, or offended,*

[p] Eccluſ. xxxii. 20, 21.

or made weak [q]. Shewing this tender Care neither to intice nor provoke a ſingle Perſon, if it can be avoided, into Sin of whatever Sort, but to *pleaſe our Neighbour for his Good, to Edification* [r], is a Precept, I believe, peculiar to the Goſpel: or at leaſt hath ſo peculiar a Streſs laid on it there, as to diſtinguiſh our Religion, greatly to its Honour, from every other Inſtitution of Life, that the World hath known.

After ſuch an Addition to all the reſt, there cannot be a completer Proviſion imagined, by Rules of Behaviour, for the Virtue, the Peace, the eternal Felicity of Mankind. And therefore Nothing remains, but what muſt depend on ourſelves; that, having the beſt and fulleſt Directions, the nobleſt Promiſes, the moſt gracious Helps, we think ſeriouſly, while it is Time, what Uſe we ought to make, and what we do make, of theſe Advantages. The Word of God will ſhew us the firſt: our own Conſciences, if honeſtly conſulted, will tell us the latter. Happy are they in the higheſt Degree, who can ſtand the Compariſon of the two: and happy they, in the next Place, whom a deep Senſe, that at preſent they cannot, excites effectually to earneſt Supplications, and faithful

[q] Rom. xiv. 13, 15, 21. [r] Rom. xv. 2.

Endeavours,

Endeavours, that they ſoon may. I conclude therefore with the Words following my Text. *The very God of Peace ſanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole Spirit, and Soul and Body, be preſerved blameleſs unto the Coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*[a].

[a] 1 Theſſ. v. 23.

SERMON IV.

LUKE xii. 57.

Yea, and why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?

THE Duties, which God hath enjoined us, though reaſonable and beneficial in the higheſt Degree, are yet, through the Depravity of human Nature, and the Prevalence of bad Cuſtoms, become ſo unacceptable, that they are practiſed, as we muſt be ſenſible, but imperfectly by the beſt, and very little by the largeſt Part of the World. Yet avowedly to neglect doing what they ought, is too ſhocking a Behaviour to ſit eaſy upon the Minds of Men. Some Plea therefore they muſt find out, either to juſtify, or at leaſt to excuſe, their Manner of Life. And various are, and ever have been, the Excuſes, invented by the irreligious and immoral, not only to main-

tain ſome Character amongſt others, but chiefly to quiet themſelves.

Now of all theſe, one of the beſt, if it were a true one, would be that of Ignorance: not knowing that ſuch and ſuch Things are incumbent on us. This appears to be a Caſe, to which not only Compaſſion muſt have Regard, but which even Juſtice itſelf muſt acquit of Guilt. And therefore it is no Wonder, if many ſhelter themſelves under ſo favourable a Pretence.

The lower Part of Mankind, in general, on almoſt every Occaſion, alledge, that they have not the Advantages of Education and Inſtruction which others have: that they are not able, perhaps even to read that holy Book, in which their Duty is ſet forth: and if they be, yet the ſame Quickneſs to underſtand it, or Leiſure to ſtudy it, cannot be looked for from them, as if their Minds had been improved by Rules of reaſoning and judging, and their Time at their own Diſpoſal. A great deal they think may be required, with the utmoſt Reaſon, from thoſe of higher Rank: but from ſuch as they are, little or nothing.

But, beſides this vulgar Sort, there is alſo a learned Kind of Ignorance, pleaded by ſome, whoſe

whoſe Freedom of Inquiry and ſuperior Sagacity hath given them Cauſe, they apprehend, to be very diffident of many Points, that others are firmly perſuaded of. And therefore they argue, that though it may be the Duty of common People, who, for Want of the Means of Knowledge or of Abilities to uſe them, muſt believe what they are taught; though it may be right and neceſſary for them, in Conſequence of their Belief, to practiſe Virtue and Piety very conſcientiouſly: yet it muſt not be expected, that thoſe of greater Genius, who are more enlightened, and perceive many Doubts in theſe Matters, ſhould put themſelves under diſagreeable Reſtraints, merely on Account of uncertain Speculations; and conform their Lives to the rigid Precepts of Chriſtianity, when they are really not well ſatisfied of the Authority of it; nor, it may be, even of natural Religion.

Thus, you ſee, the loweſt Incapacity and the higheſt Self-opinion can urge in Effect the ſame Argument, to evade what Men have no Mind to. And I ſhall now ſhew, that in both it is inconcluſive; and fully confuted by our Saviour's home Queſtion, *Yea, and why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*

Theſe

Theſe Words appear, by the parallel Places in the other Evangeliſts, to have been originally deſigned againſt thoſe amongſt the *Jews*, who, from Diſlike of the Strictneſs of our bleſſed Lord's Morality, pretended Ignorance of his divine Miſſion, after he had given abundant Proofs of it; when yet, without any ſeparate Proofs of it at all, the main Things which he taught, carried their own Evidence along with them, and every Man's Heart bore Witneſs to their Truth. They had ſeen Miracles, of various Kinds, performed in Atteſtation of his Claim: yet ſtill they were not content without more, and thoſe of their own chuſing. *The Phariſees came forth, with the Sadducees alſo, tempting him, and ſought of him a Sign from Heaven*[a]. But he, with no leſs Dignity than Prudence, refuſed to gratify a Curioſity, both ill-meaning and endleſs: and *ſighing deeply in his Spirit*, as St. *Mark* informs us[b], at this perverſe Diſpoſition of theirs; told them, with a kind, becauſe needful, Severity of Speech, where the Defect lay. *A wicked and adulterous Generation ſeeketh after a Sign*[c]: your ſinful Inclinations and Lives, not the Want or the Deſire of ſufficient Evidence, prompt you

[a] Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. [b] Verſe 12. [c] Matth. xvi. 4.

to this Demand: and *verily I say unto you, there shall be no Sign given*, no such visible Manifestation of divine Glory as you insolently require, vouchsafed *to this Generation*[d]: nor is it requisite. *When ye see a Cloud rise out of the West, straitway ye say, there cometh a Shower, and so it is. And when ye see the South Wind blow, ye say there will be Heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth: but how is it that ye do not discern this Time*[e]? That is: on other Occasions you appear very able to judge of Things by the proper Indications of them. How can you then, with any Colour of Sincerity, pretend, that amidst so many Prophecies fulfilled, and so many Miracles performed, you have not, after all, sufficient Conviction, that this is the Season when the Messiah should appear, and that I am He? Nay, as to the principal Part of my Doctrine, which is the real Cause of your Antipathy to the Whole; as to the great Precepts of pure Religion and uniform Virtue, and your Need of Repentance and Faith in God's Mercy; what Occasion is there for any farther Demonstrations of them, than your own Hearts, if honestly

[d] Mark viii. 12. [e] Luke xii. 54, 55, 56.

con-

conſulted, will not fail to afford? *Yea, and why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*

Now this Method of reaſoning is equally applicable to Unbelievers and Cavillers in all Ages. It is in vain for them, to invent new Difficulties, or magnify old ones, concerning the Authority of our Religion; while the Reaſon of Things, the Truth of Facts, and the Nature of God and Man continue to exhibit ſo full Proof of thoſe fundamental Articles of it, the eternal Obligation of moral Duties, the Sinfulneſs of every one's Nature and Life, the Neceſſity of Repentance, and humble Application for Pardon and Grace. And, ſince the true Quarrel of ſuch Perſons is againſt theſe Doctrines, and theſe cannot be ſhaken: they had much better reconcile themſelves to the Whole, than make fruitleſs Attacks upon one Part; in which if they were to ſucceed, (as they never will) they would, in Point of Argument, be almoſt as far from their favourite Scheme, of Liberty to do what they pleaſe, and think highly of themſelves notwithſtanding, as they were before. Suppoſe there are ſome Doctrines, againſt which they can find more Objections, than their Neighbours: there are ſurely others, of which they can diſcern more clearly the certain

tain Grounds. If not, they have employed their imagined ſuperior Faculties to very ill Purpoſe. Or, were they to doubt of ever ſo many Points; yet, if they take Pains for it, and force themſelves to doubt, hunting every Way for Difficulties, aſking for no Solutions, and turning a deaf Ear to them when offered; they have no more Excuſe for any Part of their conſequent wrong Behaviour, than if they had no Doubts at all. For the Whole of their Caſe is: they perplex Things on Purpoſe, in order to complain that they are not clear: walk with their Eyes wilfully ſhut, and then inſiſt, that they cannot be blamed, if they ſtumble; for it is quite dark, and they do not ſee a Step of their Way.

But let us now proceed to thoſe, who acknowledge themſelves, as many of the former would, if they had more Modeſty, the leſs knowing Part of Mankind. Some of theſe profeſs a ſecond-hand Sort of Scepticiſm; built not ſo much on their own Judgement, as that of their admired Leaders juſt mentioned. But ſince the Maſters are indefenſible, their implicit Diſciples muſt be yet more ſo. For, if the Queſtion is to be decided by the Authority of Men of Letters and Abilities, the greateſt Number and moſt eminent, beyond all

all Compariſon, have confeſſedly been always on the Side of Religion: even excluding the Clergy, as intereſted in the Caſe: which, however, is by no Means thought a ſufficient Reaſon, in other Profeſſions, why Men of known Skill and Probity ſhould be diſregarded, in what they unanimouſly affirm, after careful Examination.

But the Generality of the unlearned confeſs the Obligation of Chriſtianity moſt readily; yet daily tranſgreſs its Laws: and, when they are charged with their Fault, plead Ignorance, as we have ſeen, amongſt other Things, eſpecially the lower Part of them, to excuſe their Diſobedience to the cleareſt Revelation of God's Will, that the World ever knew; and whoſe early Diſtinction it was, that *the Poor had the Goſpel preached to them*[f]. Why then may we not ſay to ſuch, as our Saviour ſaid to the Jews; *Ye Hypocrites, ye can diſcern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth?* You can judge in all the common Affairs of Life. You can attain to a competent Skill, many Times to great Perfection, in your ſeveral Employments, and Trades: though attended with many Difficulties, and requiring much Application and

[f] Matth. xi. 5.

Dexterity.

Dexterity. You can foreſee, at a Diſtance, what will make for your worldly Intereſt, or againſt it: you can lay Schemes, full of Cunning and long Reach, for guarding againſt Dangers, retrieving Loſſes, ſecuring and improving Advantages. What hinders you then from arriving at the Knowledge of Religion; which conſiſts in Things much eaſier to be underſtood: Love and Reverence to God, Juſtice and Goodneſs to your Fellow-creatures, reaſonable and virtuous Government of yourſelves, humble Recourſe to the divine Mercy when you have done amiſs, and faithful Uſe of the divine Aſſiſtance to amend? If you have Inſtructors in the Management of Buſineſs, and the Wiſdom of this World: have you not Inſtruction alſo in the Precepts of a Chriſtian Life? One Day in ſeven of your Time, at leaſt, you are not only allowed, but enjoined, to ſpend principally in learning and thinking of your Duty. The Word of God is read to you, if you are not able to read it yourſelves: it is explained to you, if it be not already plain enough: and the moſt important Parts are the plaineſt of all. The ſeveral Articles of Chriſtian Faith and Practice are taught you in your earlieſt Childhood; and imprinted on your Memory

at

at the Time, when Impreſſions are moſt laſting. They are afterwards more diſtinctly propoſed to you from this Place, Week after Week; and inforced on you by Motives no leſs powerful, than the Love of eternal Happineſs and the Dread of eternal Miſery. There is no Sin you practiſe, no good Action you omit, but you are publicly warned, at one Time or another, of your Fault and the Danger of it; and there is no Doubt or Scruple, that can diſquiet you, concerning any Branch of your Behaviour, but you may open your Caſe often to your more learned and more prudent Neighbours, always to the Miniſters of God's Word, and receive Satisfaction about it. What poſſible Room is there left then for pleading Ignorance of your Lord and Maſter's Will? This is a Deſcription of the Means of Knowledge, with which the loweſt and meaneſt among Believers are provided. And even to theſe may be applied, though not in an equal Degree, yet with great Truth, what our Saviour declared to his immediate Diſciples: *Verily I ſay unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have deſired to ſee thoſe Things that ye ſee, and have not ſeen them; and to hear thoſe Things which ye hear, and have not heard them: but*

bleſſed

bleſſed are your Eyes, for they ſee; and your Ears, for they hear [g]. Ignorant and knowing are comparative Terms: and Men uſually compare themſelves with thoſe, that are next them only; and draw falſe Concluſions from doing ſo. A Chriſtian, of ſmaller Opportunities for Improvement than ſome of his Fellow-Chriſtians, thinks every Thing ought to be forgiven him for that Reaſon. And yet, in Reality, not only the admired Sages of heathen Antiquity, but the Patriarchs that were favoured with Communications from Heaven, the Prophets and Penmen of Scripture under the Jewiſh Diſpenſation, nay the immediate Fore-runner of our bleſſed Lord himſelf, who ſaw him and converſed with him on Earth, had leſs Means of Acquaintance with the Doctrines of Religion, than the pooreſt Diſciple of Chriſt now may have, if he will. *Verily I ſay unto you, among them that are born of Woman, there hath not riſen a greater than John the Baptiſt: notwithſtanding, he that is leaſt in the Kingdom of Heaven,* in the Goſpel Age, *is greater than he* [h].

But it may be imagined perhaps, that the Benefits of religious Inſtruction are partially repreſented, and ſpoken of much too highly, by

[g] Matth. xiii. 16. [h] Matth. xi. 11.

those who are concerned in dispensing them. Why, be it so then. Let us lay aside for a while the Consideration of what you learn here. Your Maker hath by no Means trusted you intirely to our Care: but hath appointed your Parents, your Friends, every serious Person around you, for your Instructors too: nay, to cooperate with all these, he hath placed a faithful Witness and Monitor of his Truths in every Breast; and therefore the Want of outward Helps can never justify Transgressors. What *Moses* said in God's Name to the Jews, is true in Relation to all Men: *The Commandment, which I command thee this Day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: but the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy Mouth and in thy Heart, that thou mayest do it*[i]. And what *Isaiah* said of Christianity, holds in Proportion of natural Conscience: *An high Way shall be there: and it shall be called the Way of Holiness: the way-faring Men, though Fools, shall not err therein*[k]. The Duties of Mankind are not so intricate and perplexed, but that a good Heart, without a very sagacious Head, may easily find its Way through them. For the Confirmation of this, let us take a View of the fundamental Parts of practical Religion;

[i] Deut. xxx. 11, 14. [k] Is. xxxv. 8.

those

thoſe which Men are moſt apt to fail in; and ſee which of them all any one can fairly ſay he was ignorant of, or doubtful about, and had not the Means of ſufficient Light to direct his Steps.

To begin with the Belief and Worſhip of Almighty God. Is not every Man capable of ſeeing, let him be ever ſo little acquainted with Nature, that the Heavens and the Earth, the Order of the Seaſons, the Returns of Day and Night, the whole Frame of Things in general, is full of Uſe and Beauty; and muſt be the Work of amazing Power, Wiſdom and Goodneſs? Doth not every Man feel, that he is frail and dependent, that his Life and Being is not owing to himſelf, nor conſequently, that of his Parents to them, and therefore they all proceed from a ſuperior Cauſe? Doth not every Man perceive, that he is *fearfully and wonderfully made*[1]; that the ſeveral Parts of his Compoſition are exactly fitted to the ſeveral Purpoſes of Life; the Eye for ſeeing, the Ear for hearing, each Member for its reſpective End? And his inward Inclinations and Affections no leſs ſo, than his outward Limbs? Muſt not every Man be ſenſible, that the Supports and Conveniences, which

[1] Pſ. cxxxix. 14.

he enjoys, are not ſupplied him merely by his own Care; but chiefly by the Providence of another, *who maketh his Sun to riſe*[m], *his Wind to blow*[n], *his Rain to deſcend*, his Earth to be fruitful? Hath not every Man heard it owned, that the more diligently any one Part of Nature is examined, the fuller Proofs it affords, that an almighty, allwiſe and gracious Being, muſt be the Author of the Whole? And what he hath made, no Doubt but he governs and ſuper-intends. This is the plain obvious Account of Things, that one ſhould think muſt almoſt offer itſelf of Courſe to every common Mind, without any Learning at all: and the deepeſt Learning gives it the ſtrongeſt Confirmation. Nor is it ſo much as pretended, that any Account hath been attempted of the Origin of the World, or any Thing in it, different from what Religion aſſigns, but it hath been either palpably falſe and abſurd, or impenetrably dark and unintelligible. It being then ſo clear, that there is a Maker and Preſerver of all, infinitely powerful, wiſe and bounteous, what can be more viſible than our Duty; to praiſe him for his Mercies, pray to him for the Continuance of them, place our Happineſs in his Favour, fear his Diſpleaſure,

[m] Matth. v. 45. [n] Pſ. cxlvii. 18.

and

and do his Will? Surely the moſt ignorant among us, that think at all, cannot but find all this written in their Hearts: nor can the acuteſt and moſt artful diſpute againſt it, without being ſelf-condemned. And what then hath any one to plead for himſelf, if he lives regardleſs of Him, *in whom he lives, and moves, and hath his Being*[o]; without Gratitude to his Bounty, from whom all he hath, or can hope for, comes; without Obedience to his Commands, who requires Nothing of us, but for our own Good; without Reſignation to his Will, who is rightful Lord of the Univerſe, and uſes boundleſs Authority only to the Purpoſes of infinite Goodneſs? Surely, as the Apoſtle reaſons, ſince *the inviſible Things of God, even his eternal Power and Godhead, are clearly ſeen from the Creation of the World, being underſtood by the Things that are made; they are without Excuſe, who, when they know God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful*[p].

Let us now proceed to the Duties, which we owe to our Fellow-creatures. The Senſe of theſe, becauſe they are of more immediate Importance to the Good of Society, God hath imprinted with greater Strength on our Minds, than

[o] Acts xvii. 28. [p] Rom. i. 20, 21.

even that of our Obligations to himſelf. As it muſt be the Will of him, who is ſo juſt and good to us all, that we ſhould be juſt and good to one another; and from this Principle, as the Root, every Branch of right Behaviour ſprings: ſo he hath planted in our Hearts a natural Love of Equity, a natural Feeling of kind Affection; a natural Conſcience, applauding us when we act according to theſe Diſpoſitions, condemning us when we violate them: and ſeldom do we deſerve its Reproaches, but either at the Time, or ſoon after, we undergo them. Conſider but a little more particularly, what the mutual Duties of Men are: Honeſty and Fairneſs in their Dealings, Truth in their Words, Friendlineſs in their Demeanor, Willingneſs to forgive Offences, reſpectful Obedience to Superiors, ready Condeſcenſion to Inferiors, tender Love to near Relations, Pity and Relief of the Poor, diligent Care to be ſerviceable to Mankind in our proper Station. Which one of theſe Obligations (and all the reſt are like them) can any pretend he was ignorant of, or doubtful about? Who of us all hath ever done an unjuſt, a hard, an ill-natured, a paſſionate, an undutiful, an inſolent, Action; or lived an idle, uſeleſs Life; and can truly ſay, he was not ſenſible that he did amiſs?

We

We all know, when others do amiſs in theſe Reſpects: and therefore we are very capable of knowing, when we do ſo ourſelves. We may drown the Voice of Conſcience in turbulent Paſſions and vehement Purſuits of Profit or Pleaſure; we may coolly and deliberately refuſe to obey it: but it will ſpeak, and from Time to Time will be heard. And therefore it is not Ignorance or Doubt, but Wickedneſs of Heart, and *holding the Truth in Unrighteouſneſs*[q], that makes us negligent of, and injurious to each other, ſo often as we are.

The third Part of our Duty is the Government of ourſelves, according to the Rules of Sobriety, Temperance and Chaſtity. Now who doth not know, that the Obſervance of theſe Virtues is right and fit: that the Violation of them is prejudicial to the Reaſon, the Health, the Reputation, the Fortunes, the Families of Men, and introduces Riot and Madneſs, Confuſion and Miſery into the World? Who doth not ſee, that Superiority to the Cravings of Appetite, and Scorn of irregular Gratifications, is a worthy, an honourable Character: and that Exceſs, Diſſoluteneſs and Debauchery hath ſomething low and ſhameful in it: and ſtill more ſo, as,

[q] Rom. i. 18.

by habitual Indulgence, Men come to be leſs aſhamed of it? Can any one ſay, he did not know, that Gluttony and Drunkenneſs and promiſcuous Lewdneſs were Sins: but thought them as conſiſtent with the Obligations of a rational Nature, the good Order of Society, and the Commands of his Maker, as Moderation and Self-denial? And if no Man is capable of miſtaking thus, why is not *the Judgement of God according to Truth, againſt them which commit ſuch Things*[r]?

But further yet: Doth not every Man know in his Conſcience, that, plain as his Duties to God, his Fellow-creatures and himſelf, are, he hath, more or leſs, tranſgreſſed them all; that he hath a Nature continually prone to Tranſgreſſion; that therefore he needs both Pardon for what is paſt, and Aſſiſtance for the Time to come; and that he can have neither, but through God's undeſerved Mercy? Or, however ignorant Men left to their own Reaſon may be through Careleſneſs and Wickedneſs, as they were indeed amazingly ignorant; or, whatever Doubts they had, after ſinning, concerning their Forgiveneſs and Acceptance, as they could not help having great Doubts: yet at leaſt muſt not every Profeſſor of the Goſpel be ſenſible, both

[r] Rom. ii. 2.

what

what he is to do, and what he may promiſe himſelf on complying with the Terms which it propoſes: and that theſe are, *Repentance towards God, Faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt* [a], and humble Uſe of the appointed Means of Grace: of Attention to the Reading and Preaching of God's Word, earneſt Prayer, worthy Participation of the holy Sacrament? And how can he then plead Ignorance hereafter, if he reſolves now to live according to his own Fancy, and to ſtand or fall by his own Merits; and haughtily deſpiſes, or indolently neglects, applying, as a penitent Sinner ought, to infinite Goodneſs?

Upon the Whole, ſince moſt of the main Branches of our Duty are thus obvious to our Underſtandings of themſelves; and all of them are conſtantly taught us, by the holy Scripture, by the Laws of our Country, by the Opinion and Conſent of the wiſeſt and beſt of Mankind, by the Inſtructions of Perſons appointed for that Purpoſe; what Account do we imagine we ſhall poſſibly be able to give, why Religion, ſo eaſily apprehended, is ſo little practiſed by us? If any do not know what is commanded; it muſt be, becauſe they avoided knowing it: if any doubt of the Reality of the Command; the

[a] Acts xx. 21.

Reaſon

Reaſon is, that they deſire to doubt: and how can we flatter ourſelves, that any Thing is excuſable, which proceeds from a Diſpoſition of Mind ſo groſsly and wilfully wrong? Suppoſe a Servant of ours had purpoſely kept out of the Way of receiving our Orders, or invented Perplexities and Cavils about the Meaning of them, or the Certainty of our having delivered them, becauſe he had no Mind to obey them: would that juſtify him? Should we not immediately tell him, that what he eaſily might and clearly ought to have known and underſtood, he was inexcuſable, if he would not know and underſtand? And what muſt we think of our great Maſter in Heaven, if we try to impoſe on Him with Devices and Tricks, that will not paſs amongſt ourſelves?

But in Reality Men have not this Excuſe, if it were one. They do know, how they ought to behave; they do know that they ought *to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly, in this World, looking for* [1] the Recompences of another: and they well know in the Main, what Particulars this Obligation comprehends; how grievouſly they have fallen ſhort of them, and what Need they have to repent and humbly beg Forgiveneſs

[1] Tit. ii. 12, 13.

and

and Strength, through him who hath procured us a Title to both. Nor can they pretend, that theſe are trifling Matters: the Happineſs even of this Life dpends on them; or, if it did not, the all-ſeeing God hath enjoined them, as the Conditions and the Means of Happineſs in the next; the Judge of the whole Earth will inquire ſtrictly at the great Day into our Performance of them; and there can be no good Account given him, why a plain Duty was omitted or tranſgreſſed. We can eaſily deceive ourſelves: we can make ſpecious Pleas one to another for our Failings; which the Occaſion that we have for Allowances in our Turn, incline us often to look upon very favourably in our Neighbours. But, in the Sight of God, ſuppoſing a Thing incumbent on us, and ſuppoſing it eaſily known to be ſo: what can be ſaid to the Purpoſe, why we did not perform it? "We were poor and ignorant." But we were not, or we needed not to have been, ignorant in this Particular. "We were ſuſpicious and doubtful." But our Doubts were affected, not real; or partial, not honeſt and upright. Or if we doubted ever ſo fairly about ſome Things; why did not we do thoſe, of which we could not doubt? And even for the reſt, why did

we not take Care, that our Practice ſhould be on the undoubtedly ſafer, that is, the virtuous and religious, Side? "But we had ſtrong Inclinations, that prompted us to the Courſe we took." No Wonder: here was the Trial of our Virtue; it was our Buſineſs to have reſiſted them. "But human Virtue is not ſufficient:" Therefore we ſhould have applied earneſtly for divine Grace. "But we were ſurpriſed into wrong Behaviour." It was our Buſineſs to be watchful; and at leaſt a Habit and a Life of Sin cannot happen by Surpriſe. In ſhort, let us multiply Pretences as long as we pleaſe, the very Nature of Duty implies, that it ought to be done.

Still there are ſome, eſpecially in ſome Circumſtances, who are to a much greater Degree excuſable for the Sins they are guilty of, than others. But yet an Excuſe is not a Juſtification: and will leaſt of all prove ſuch to thoſe, who, inſtead of endeavouring to act right, ſet themſelves to contrive Reaſons, why their acting wrong ſhould be diſpenſed with. It is true, the very beſt have their Faults: and Faults not indulged ſhall be forgiven us, if we are truly ſorry for them, and earneſtly apply to God's Mercy through Chriſt for Pardon, and carefully watch

watch againſt the Return of them. But when Men firſt allow themſelves to ſin, then ſtand on their own Defence; and particularly, if they plead Ignorance or Doubtfulneſs of what they have ſuch abundant Means of knowing and being ſure of: they muſt not hope, that this Conduct, if they perſevere in it, can eſcape final Condemnation.

It ought however to be acknowledged after all, that many have comparatively but low Abilities, and ſmall Opportunities for Knowledge: and that to ſome, whoſe Underſtandings are not weak, but perverſely turned, greater Opportunities are of ſmall Uſe; for what enlightens others, only dazzles them. And accordingly our Saviour moſt equitably conſiders theſe Diſadvantages; and acquaints us, ten Verſes before the Text, that *the Servant, which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his Will, ſhall be beaten with many Stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, ſhall be beaten with few Stripes*[u]. But theſe Words, though full of Terror to the great, the learned and the wiſe, if they neglect their Duty; by no Means carry in them that Encouragement to the poor, the illiterate

[u] Luke xii. 47, 48.

and

and ſlow of Apprehenſion, which poſſibly they may ſeem to do. For they chiefly relate, not to ſuch Times as ours; but that, in which they were ſpoken: when the Jews had great Light, and therefore great Guilt if they ſinned; but the Gentiles were, and had been long, in profound Darkneſs: *the Times of which Ignorance God* is repreſented, as in Compariſon *winking at*; but *now*, in the Goſpel Age, he *commands*, under ſeverer Penalties, *all Men every where to repent*; becauſe he hath given them a clearer Knowledge of his Pleaſure, and a fuller *Aſſurance* of his *judging the World in Righteouſneſs* *. And yet it muſt be obſerved, our Saviour did not apprehend anyone to have been ſo ignorant, even then, of his Maſter's Will, as to eſcape being puniſhed for tranſgreſſing it; but declares, that he who knew the leaſt of it; *he who*, compared with others, *knew it not*; knew enough however to deſerve being *beaten with Stripes*; though fewer, than they ſhould undergo, who, with ſtronger Conviction and diſtincter Perceptions of their Duty, were equally Tranſgreſſors of it. And how ſevere even the mildeſt Puniſhments of a wicked Life may be, God forbid we ſhould any of us try. For whoever ſins wilfully in

* Acts xvii. 30, 31.

Hopes

Hopes of ſuffering but little hereafter; for that very Reaſon will be made to ſuffer a great deal.

The Concluſion of the whole Matter is, that we have Reaſon all to apply to ourſelves the Prophet's Words: *He hath ſhewn thee, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord thy God requireth of thee*[x]. And though it ſtill be true, that ſome Ages of the World have been dark, and others blinded with falſe Lights; that ſome Men naturally ſee little, and others are ſtrangely given to ſee wrong: yet, in general, the Duties of Life are level to the Capacities of all Men: and eſpecially among Chriſtians, but above all, Chriſtians ſo peculiarly bleſſed with the Means of Inſtruction, as we of this Nation are, no one can poſſibly, without either deliberate Obſtinacy, or intolerable Negligence, continue unacquainted with what he is bound to do; or the Recompence he is to expect, if he do it not. *For this is the Condemnation; that Light is come into the World, and Men have loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil*[y].

[x] Micah vi. 8. [y] John iii. 19.

SERMON V.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

—— *Lovers of Pleaſures, more than Lovers of God.*

THE wiſe and gracious Ruler of the World hath created us to obey him, and from that Obedience to receive our proper Share of Happineſs. He hath adapted a Variety of Satisfactions to the various Parts of our Frame: and taught us by Nature, but more diſtinctly by his Word, the due Subordinations of each; and the Circumſtances, in which we may or may not lawfully partake of them. Some of theſe are capable of being exactly ſpecified: and in ſuch we cannot tranſgreſs, without either acknowledging our Guilt, or daring to deny the Authority of the Law. Many take the humbler Method of the two; and yet grow little, if at all, better: many the bolder, and grow continually worſe. Both

are frequently admoniſhed, and may be left at preſent to their own Reflections. But other Caſes admit only a general and leſs accurate Deſcription: which leaves Room for thoſe, who deſire it, to go very improper Lengths, and ſtill imagine they are within Bounds. Thus, in eating and drinking; to uſe the good Creatures of God with Delight is certainly allowable: and therefore too many ſet their Minds to a ſtrange Degree on the Practice and the Study of this meaneſt of Gratifications; and think they may load and inflame themſelves without Scruple, provided they ſtop but at all ſhort of ſhocking Intemperance. Thus again what we commonly call Amuſements are in their Nature innocent. God hath formed us for pleaſing Intercourſe, and put Mirth in our Hearts with Intent that we ſhould exert it. The ſprightly Diſpoſition of Youth calls for gladſome Activity: the Fatigues of Buſineſs, the Infirmities of Old Age, the Weariſomeneſs of ill Health and low Spirits, often require the beſt Relief, that Cheerfulneſs can miniſter. And not to allow, that our Maker conſiders *whereof we are made*[a], would be giving an Idea of Religion both unamiable and falſe. But then, juſt

[a] Pſ. ciii. 14.

how

how far each of us may lawfully carry our Indulgence, cannot be minutely pointed out. And therefore, inſtead of being contented to ſpeak and think mildly of others, which would be a right Uſe of this Uncertainty; we are apt to be negligent of reſtraining ourſelves, which is a very wrong one. For there are numberleſs Things, in which Limits cannot be fixed preciſely, and yet conſiderable Exceſſes are deſtructive. Now in all theſe, our Ignorance ought to teach us a reaſonable, though not ſcrupulous, Caution: but eſpecially in Matters of gay Entertainment: becauſe the preſent Age hath confeſſedly a peculiar Turn that Way. Whether the preceding ones had not other Faults as bad, is out of the Queſtion: our Concern is to watch againſt our own: for which Purpoſe the Text affords us a moſt equitable and comprehenſive and trying Direction; that we are not to *love Pleaſures more than God*: meaning, than our Duty to Him. For, *this is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments* [b]. Now he hath enjoined us very important Duties: of improving ourſelves in every Thing worthy, and being ſerviceable to our Fellow-Creatures. What Influence then upon theſe will our Amuſements, as we conduct them, have?

[b] 1 John v. 3.

The more ſteadily we apply, without impairing our Healths or Faculties by it, to Affairs of real Uſe, the properer Part we act in Life. Do then indeed our ſerious Occupations wear us down ſo, that we need all the Time, which we take, to recruit ourſelves? Or do we only, when we are tired of one Trifle, run to another? Is it Matter of Humiliation to us, that we are obliged to ſpend ſo much of every Day inſignificantly: or do we take a Pride in ſpending it thus; lead as many into the ſame Way as we can, and throw Contempt on thoſe, whom we cannot? Have we impartially examined, what Obligations, public and private, are incumbent on us: whether we are chiefly attentive to theſe, omitting none; or to what other Things, and what the Benefit of them is: whether it be any other, than keeping ourſelves in Humour, like froward Children? We ſhould do well to ſtate the Diſpoſal of our Time: firſt ſet down, how much we employ in each of our Concerns of Moment; then how much goes in Diverſions of one Kind or another, in preparing for them, in Refreſhment after them, in needleſs Company at home and abroad; and, if the Diſproportion be great, think beforehand, how wretched a Void and Blank, at beſt, our Lives will

will appear at the Close of them to have been, should the Remainder of them be wasted in the same Manner.

We all wish to be distinguished to our Honour. But in whose Eyes will such Persons, or a Nation composed of such, be honoured? and for what Qualifications? Knowledge and Prudence require Industry and Experience to attain them: Worth and Probity require thoughtful Self-inspection. And one doth not see, how they, who claim only outside Pre-eminences, can possibly esteem one another; or why they should wish to herd so much together, unless to take Comfort in their mutual Want of Merit. At least vain Opinion will never convert Shew into Substance. We must surely know, that we are capable of more valuable Accomplishments, and of delighting in them. Probably our Education hath furnished us with some Experience of improving our Understandings and our Tempers. Have we no Room left then for farther Improvements? Or have we lost the Relish of them? And for what better have we exchanged it? Or how unhappily soever we were bred, as indeed too many young People are extremely pitiable for having been taught the least of what was most worth learn-

ing; yet we muſt be ſenſible, there are thoſe, who poſſeſs more ſolid Endowments. Are they then of no Value in Life, or have they not in all Ages been allowed to be of the higheſt? Why therefore ſhould not we ſtrive to reſemble them, and take a little Leiſure to think, how we may live to more Purpoſe? It may be, we do not deſire Leiſure to think. It is unentertaining: it is painful. But what a Figure do we make to others and ourſelves, if we cannot bear our own Company, but muſt fly to any Thing, rather than fail to get rid of it? Thought can be painful only becauſe we are acting amiſs: and then thinking ſo as to amend, is the only Remedy; and no Caſe is too far gone for it. Perhaps we are unable to carry on ſolitary Meditation to any good Effect. But we can have Recourſe to the Aſſiſtance of proper Books. Idle Reading indeed completes the Deſtruction of the Time, that idle Converſation ſpares us. But judicious Writings on the Subject of Conduct, religious, moral, and prudent, are at once the Medicine and the Nouriſhment of the Mind. If ſtill after theſe we want farther Inſtruction, every true Friend we have, every good Man we conſult, will gladly give it us. And with ſuch Helps,

Helps, why ſhould we not aſſert our Share in the Dignity of human Nature?

But poſſibly we aſpire to appear advantageouſly both in weightier Matters, and lighter. And by due Application, moſt People may, as far as they need. But then the chief Regard muſt ever be paid to the principal Point. For even elegant and liberal and learned Accompliſhments have, by excluding ſtill better Things, greatly diminiſhed the Value of many Characters. And when ſuch Attainments, as barely, if at all, riſe above indifferent, or perhaps ſink below it, divide our Eſteem with laudable ones, the Mixture will do great Harm, both to ourſelves, and, by its Example, to others. But when they are the main Objects of our Ambition; the Applauſe of the unthinking, ſhould we procure it, will be bought much too dear; the Soul will loſe its Vigour and grow frivolous; Matters of Conſequence become diſtaſteful; by Degrees the very Notion, which are ſo, will be effaced: and a Group of the reigning Follies of the Time being, engroſs the Heart. But particularly Self-Government will be forgotton in the Midſt of Self-Indulgences, that will pretend to be harmleſs, till they prove undeniably criminal. In theſe Circumſtances,

the Buſineſs of our Stations, the Examination of our Affairs, the Care of thoſe who are moſt intimately connected with us, and, much more, the Inſpection of our Hearts, of our State towards God, of our Title to a happy Eternity, will be continually poſtponed, or ſuperficially hurried over, to comply with every trifling Engagement, every ſudden Fancy, or even mere Indolence. And perhaps, rather than take the Pains of knowing and doing what we ought, we ſhall make it our Refuge to profeſs a Contempt of it: in which abſurd Declaration, a natural or acquired Fluency of lively Talk will bear People out ſo well to thoſe, with whom Similarity of Manners prompts them to aſſociate, that before it is long, they will ſeem quite ſatisfied in neglecting every Thing they ſhould mind.

Yet all the While, what they call a Life of Pleaſure is very often only an Affectation of being pleaſed. They put on Airs of great Gaiety, and in Truth their Pleaſures are flat and inſipid: they relieve one taſteleſs Scene by another a little different; are miſerable in the Intervals of their Amuſements, and far from happy during the Continuance of them. Nay indeed, under Colour of Relaxations, they are, to thoſe who engage

gage throughly in them, ſore Fatigues; from which, whether they will confeſs it or not, Relaxation is much wanted: and ſome undergo a ſpeedy, and many a lingering, Martyrdom to them. If Religion enjoined Men to mortify and macerate themſelves at this Rate, what dreadful Names would it be called! In all Likelihood, were the Truth known, Numbers would chuſe a quieter Way of living, if one Part of them could be ſure, that the other would keep them in Countenance. It is great Pity therefore, but they ſhould mutually explain themſelves on this Tyranny of Faſhion: and not go on together in wild Chaces of imaginary Pleaſure, when they had all rather ſit ſtill. But farther, ſeveral, that would be ſorry to quit their Diverſions, follow them only to baniſh Reflection on ſome bad or imprudent Thing that they have done, or Courſe that they are in. Now as this can be no better than a palliative Cure, and will uſually exaſperate the Diſeaſe, they ought to ſeek a more effectual Remedy. And we ſhould all conſider, that probably the ſame Entertainments will not for ever afford us the ſame Delight: and yet by long Uſe it may grow or ſeem hardly poſſible to do without them, though they not only miſbecome, but even tire

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us. Nay ſome, when they have once fixed it in their Minds, that Happineſs conſiſts in Gaiety, and find the innocent Sorts of gay Enjoyments are become taſteleſs, venture, for the Sake of a higher Reliſh, on ſuch as are pernicious even in this World.

Another Conſideration, both of Prudence and Duty, is, that the many Expences of this public Sort of Life are exceſſive; and to ſupply them, Creditors are frequently left unpaid, except the leaſt deſerving; due Proviſion for Children is omitted, and ignominious Arts of raiſing Money practiſed. Or if the Votaries of Pleaſure do obſerve Juſtice, let them aſk their Conſciences, what Proportion of their Income goes in Works of Piety, Mercy, Encouragement of uſeful Undertakings, and what in luxurious Trifles? It will be ſaid, that theſe laſt do Good by ſetting the poor to labour. But is our Intention to do Good by them, or only to gratify our Vanity and Voluptuouſneſs? Beſides, much more Good is done by procuring Health to the ſick, right Education to the young, Inſtruction to the ignorant and vicious, or by durable Works of general Utility and national Honour. And employing the lower Part of the People in miniſtering to the Luxury

of

of the higher, can no more enrich or ſupport a Kingdom, than employing the Servants of a private Family in the ſame Manner, can enrich or ſupport that.

But one faſhionable Expence muſt be particularly mentioned: that which bears the Name, often very falſely, of Play. Be it for ever ſo little, conſuming much Time in it, is the moſt unimproving and irrational Employment that can be. But falſe Shame and Emulation frequently raiſe it to a very incommodious and diſtreſſing Height, even amongſt thoſe who profeſs to be moderate. And the Lengths that others go, are the moſt ſpeedily and abſolutely ruinous of all Things. The more calmly Men bear their Loſſes, the worſe; if they are the leſs likely to leave off for it. But uſually they feel moſt tormenting Agitations: yet ruſh on to loſe more, from a groundleſs Hope of Gain; and perhaps at Length call in Diſhoneſty to the Aid of Imprudence. I am unwilling to name the worſt Act of Deſperation, to which extravagant and vicious Indulgences too frequently lead. But ſurely it cannot fail to be viſible, that deliberately and preſumptuouſly ending an immoral and miſchievous Life, by the impious and falſe Bravery

of

of a voluntary Death, inſtead of an humble and exemplary Penitence, is the completeſt Rebellion againſt God, of which the Heart of Man is capable.

Another conſiderable Ingredient in the favourite Amuſements of the World, are public Spectacles. And provided Regard be had to Time and Coſt, they might be allowably and beneficially frequented, if they were preſerved from Tendencies dangerous to Virtue. But Failings in that Article totally alter the Nature of them; and groſs Failings reflect not only on our Morals, but our Taſte. Indeed it is lamentable that, fond as we are of adopting the Faſhions and Qualities of our Neighbours, often much for the worſe, we ſhould not import what is praiſeworthy in them, but ſuffer the moſt diſſolute of them to excell us in the Chaſtity of their dramatical Repreſentations: yet after all, were they ever ſo innocent, in Proportion as they are trifling and inſignificant, they are contemptible and unworthy of Regard.

But the Effects of leſs general Amuſements, even of thoſe at our own Houſes, may be extremely hurtful, if they are the Means of admitting Perſons of profligate Conduct and

Principles

Principles into familiar Converſation and Acquaintance with others. For hence they will have the Encouragement of finding, that they need not either amend or conceal their Faults to be well received. The inconſiderate, that is, moſt People, ſeeing little or no Difference made between good and bad Characters, will perſuade themſelves on Occaſion, that there can be no great Difference between good and bad Actions. But the young, above all, will be likely to admire thoſe, whom it extremely concerns them to abhor. For, in ſpite of the moſt prudent Cautions, which however are not always given them, they are eaſily impoſed on by a ſhewy Appearance, joined with plauſible Talk. And the common Talk of ſuch Aſſemblies, though it were never openly to aſſault Virtue, which yet may be eſpecially feared in ſuch of them where People converſe in Diſguiſes, and are or may ſeem unknown to each other, hath notwithſtanding many Things to undermine good Principles, and weaken right Sentiments, particularly the continual Suppoſition on which this whole Way of living is built, that Entertainment is the Buſineſs of our Being. They whoſe only School is the World, will think ſo of Courſe: and in ſuch

ſuch Places cannot be ſafely contradicted. Poſſibly, with all this, there may be no immediate ſtrong Symptoms of much Harm ſuffered in them. But ſtill as a Courſe of ſober Intemperance may damage the Health more, than great Exceſſes now and then: ſo may a Life, ſeemingly but a little too gay, corrupt the Heart more, than a few Acts of confeſſed Immorality.

And beſides the direct Danger to Morals, what Influence will it have on Piety? About that perhaps we are not ſolicitous. And yet the firm Belief of a future Recompence muſt be the beſt Security of right Behaviour in all Circumſtances. And the King of the whole Earth cannot but require to have the due Reſpect and Homage he hath appointed paid him by his Subjects, as neceſſary to preſerve that Obedience to his Laws, without which it is impoſſible they ſhould be happy. Yet the public Worſhip of God, even on that Day which he hath appropriated to it, is almoſt intirely neglected by the greateſt Part of thoſe who live to Amuſements; and by many of them profeſſedly and contemptuouſly: though poſſibly attending it might afford them ſome Inſtruction, as well as expreſs proper Duty. Much leſs do they

they regard any other Seaſons, appointed for the peculiar Exerciſe of Seriouſneſs: but, it may be, affect to crowd Diverſions into the moſt ſacred Week of it; either in wanton Defiance of public Authority and common Decency, or in Oſtentation of their imagined Superiority to vulgar Ways of thinking. But ſurely others know as well as they, that outward Obſervances in themſelves are Nothing. But ſtill, by their Effects, both in civil and religious Matters, they are very important Things: and may be uſeful to the wiſeſt Perſons. Though, indeed, when there is a little Weakneſs mixed with Piety and Virtue, they have no Title to ridicule it, who are guilty of the numberleſs Abſurdities of Diſſoluteneſs or Profaneneſs. And though the moſt innocent Superſtition ſhould be ſeparated from Religion if it can, yet not with the Hazard of rooting up both together.

But ſuppoſing we pay ſufficient Regard to theſe external Proprieties, what Diſpoſition doth our Attachment to Pleaſure leave us towards inward Devotion? Do we pray to God in private? Is it with Attention and Reverence? And doth that regulate the reſt of the Day, or the reſt of the Day wear out the Impreſſion

of that? Do we ſtatedly think of our Intereſt in the divine Favour, and our approaching State after Death, as our main Concerns? And do we not only fear the Judge of all, but love the Father of Mercy, ſuch as he hath exhibited himſelf to Man, by giving his Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to move us to all Good? Or hath not our Manner of living deadened our Feeling of theſe Things, if ever we had any: and are we not proceeding to efface the ſmall Remnants of them? This is not the Behaviour of a rational Creature, of a Penitent for Sin, of a Candidate for eternal Felicity: there can ariſe from it no *Meetneſs for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light* [c], no Suſceptibility of ſpiritual Happineſs, no Hope of *eſcaping the Damnation of Hell* [d]. Not only a few of our detached Hours, but our whole Being is God's, and to be employed as he approves. Our lawful daily Buſineſs, nay our needful Relaxations from it, we may humbly preſent to him, as Part of what he deſigned us for. But can we offer up a Series of Nothing but idle Diſſipations or worſe, and beg him to accept of that? Our baptiſmal Vow promiſed other

[c] Col. i. 12. [d] Matth. xxiii. 33.

Things

Things for us: the holy Scripture hath prescribed us a very different Sort of Conduct: hath told us, that we *cannot serve two Masters*[e]; that they, *who live in Pleasure, are dead, while they live*[f]; that he, who delighted himself splendidly every Day, and took this for his Portion, *lift up his Eyes in Torment*[g]. And are we then willing, both to fail of Reward, and suffer Punishment? Perhaps the latter may seem unjust, merely for spending our Days in harmless Diversions. But if otherwise they were harmless, would not a Servant of ours merit punishing, who for his own Gratification should obstinately neglect his allotted Share of Work in the Family? Now we are the Servants of our Maker: and he hath forewarned us, that a *slothful Servant* shall be deemed *a wicked one*[h].

But the Life of those, who love Pleasure more than God, is fuller of Guilt, in Proportion as it gives others a more public Invitation to live in the same Way. If the rich and great proclaim, that voluptuous Amusements are their Passion, and Religion their Contempt; as it will provoke the better Part of their Inferiors to think ill of them, which is a very undesirable Thing, so it

[e] Matth. vi. 24. [f] 1 Tim. v. 6. [g] Luke xvi. 19, 23.
[h] Matth. xxv. 26.

will incline the larger Part, without thinking at all well of them, to imitate their Example. For if they may behave ſo, the Concluſion will be boldly drawn, that every one elſe may. And yet the Effects of that Perſuaſion muſt be inſupportable. For how ſhall our Domeſtics, and neareſt Relations, all we have Concerns with, and the Body of the People in general, be kept from every Thing that is wrong and miſchievous, in the Midſt of ſuch numerous Temptations, if they learn from us to make Self-indulgence, unreſtrained by the Apprehenſions of a future Account, their governing Principle? Our Laws cannot be executed with Rigour: and Legiſlators and Magiſtrates will not be thought in earneſt, or, if they are, will be thought injurious, when they prohibit what the Practice of too many of them ſhews, they look upon as the only happy Life.

People of Faſhion, eſpecially of that Sex, which aſcribes to itſelf the moſt Knowledge, have nearly thrown off all Obſervation of the Lord's Day: perhaps keep ſuch Hours, that neither they, nor their Families, can go to Church, at leaſt in one Part of it: will vary thoſe Hours readily for any other Purpoſe, but by no Means for this. And when they have paſſed

paſſed the Morning and Afternoon in Neglect of Piety, Numbers of them paſs the Evening in what they know will be commonly interpreted, and the more for that Neglect, an open Contradiction to Piety. Or if, to avoid Scandal, they ſometimes vouchſafe their Attendance on divine Service in the Country, they ſeldom or never do it in Town: where Patterns of it are peculiarly needful; and from whence Accounts of their Behaviour will ſoon be ſpread to the remoteſt Places where they have Influence. Now by theſe Means the Sunday, inſtead of being made, to thoſe beneath them, the uſefulleſt Part of their Time, by religious Worſhip and Inſtruction, Reading and Thought; as well as the pleaſanteſt, by Reſt from Labour and friendly Intercourſe; becomes the moſt pernicious. A large Proportion of the Tradeſmen in theſe two Cities uſually ſpend the Whole of it abroad in Diverſions, often vicious, always coſtly: and by affecting them then, get a ruinous Taſte for them throughout the Week. The lower Sort ſtill are ambitious to follow them as cloſe as they can, every Day indeed, but on that eſpecially: conſume the Beginning of it, in ſtupid Sloth, the Remainder in Lewdneſs or Drunkenneſs, which impair their Faculties and deſtroy

their Health; beſides intercepting the Profits of their Labour from thoſe, whom it ſhould maintain. And if they once come to think Gaming alſo allowable on that only Time, in which they have Leiſure for it; the Loſers will be yet more throughly undone and deſperate, and the Winners not the richer, but only the more debauched.

Every Species of Wickedneſs cannot fail to make a great Progreſs amidſt theſe licentious Principles and Practices: which are induſtriouſly propagated, both by the Diſcourſe of bad Men, contrary to all common Prudence, and in Books alſo, publiſhed not only againſt revealed Religion, (which they who diſbelieve will few of them believe any, and none to any great Purpoſe) but againſt a future Recompence of human Actions; and ſuited, in the Manner of writing, to every Reader, and, in the Price, to every Purchaſer. Such as have learnt theſe Leſſons, will yield, and no Wonder, to the preſent Solicitation of each Appetite and each Fancy, be the Conſequences what they may. When they are diſtreſſed, they will venture on whatever Crime they think may enable them to go on a little longer: they will endeavour to conceal a firſt Crime by a ſecond; and

if

if at laſt they cannot evade Puniſhment, they will deſpiſe it. For what is even Death, which every one may make as eaſy as he pleaſes, if they neither hope nor fear any Thing after it?

We of the Clergy are principally concerned to oppoſe this Torrent of Impiety: and I truſt we do it with faithful Zeal. But the immediate Anſwer to us is, that we are pleading our own Cauſe: though indeed it is that of the Public. And therefore the hearty Concurrence of the Laity, jointly countenancing, by their Examples, their Favours, their Commendations, their Reproofs, by Reverence to Religion, Moderation in Pleaſures, Frugality in Expence, Diligence in the Buſineſs of every one's proper Station, is highly neceſſary: and will complete the Bleſſing of the fulleſt Liberty, and moſt fatherly Adminiſtration of Government, that ever Nation enjoyed; which otherwiſe we are in imminent Danger of abuſing, to our own deſerved Ruin.

Yet too great Strictneſs may do Harm, or diſqualify for doing Good: and according to Circumſtances, partaking of Amuſements, that otherwiſe are not eligible, may be very prudent: beſides that ſome may be under ſuch Authority

and Direction, as may oblige them in Duty to do what they cannot intirely approve. And then they ſhould endeavour to do it both obligingly and gracefully: but always remember, that they are on ſlippery Ground: never go farther, than is really innocent; never farther, than they need: much leſs, blame or deſpiſe thoſe, who are unwilling or unqualified to bear a Part with them: but carefully preſerve a juſt Preference for the higher Order of Obligations; be humble in the Midſt of Pomp, attentive to ſerious Reflections in the Midſt of Gaiety; do all they can, without expoſing themſelves, to guard or bring back others; and ſeize every Opportunity of promoting what is right, where too generally what is wrong abounds.

But they who are not called to enter far into the livelier Scenes of this World, will do very commendably, to ſhew by Facts, in a freer and opener Manner, their ſettled Perſuaſion, that Happineſs conſiſts in quite other Matters; to ſhew, that they can enjoy themſelves perfectly well, without having any Reliſh for theſe; nay, can abſtain from them without Difficulty, though they have a Reliſh for them. And the more they do ſo, keeping up their good Humour, the more exemplary they are. But the Clergy

ſhould

ſhould be Patterns of this Abſtinence beyond all others. For if inſtead of being grave and ſtudious and laborious in our Profeſſion, we diſſipate ourſelves in Vanities, or ſink into luxurious Delicacy or Indolence; the Awe of our Character, and the Weight of our Preaching will be loſt: the thoughtleſs will imagine they may ſafely ſtep a little farther than we; and thus will fall into palpable Sin: while the indifferent to Religion and Virtue will make it their Boaſt, that we aim to be as like them as for Shame we can; and will *blaſpheme*, on our Account, *the worthy Name, by which we are called*[1].

Poſſibly ſo many Cautions againſt Fondneſs for Pleaſure may ſeem to leave thoſe who regard them, in a very joyleſs and uneaſy Condition. But indeed they are only plain and very practicable Rules for that Diſcipline of our Temper and Conduct, which is neceſſary for our true Happineſs even here, and for our eternal Felicity hereafter. Chriſtian Piety allows us, under ſuch Regulations as are evidently reaſonable, every Enjoyment of Senſe, every Delight of elegant Taſte, every Exertion of ſocial Cheerfulneſs; and forbids Nothing, but Miſchief, Madneſs and Miſery. Then beſides, it height-

[1] James ii. 7.

ens to the utmoſt all the nobler Satisfactions of the Mind: that of ſincere Good-will to all Men; that of tender Complacency in thoſe, to whom we are united more nearly: whence proceed honourable Eſteem, and affectionate Returns. Or, though we miſs the Regard we deſerve from Men, we ſhall have a reviving Conſciouſneſs, that we have acted worthily, that we have laboured to promote Goodneſs and Happineſs on Earth, that the Sins and Sufferings of our Fellow-creatures are not owing to us. This applauding Teſtimony of our Hearts will indeed be mixed with the Grief of many Failings: but alſo, with the Aſſurance, that our heavenly Father forgives them, for the Sake of our gracious Redeemer; with the Experience, that he is enabling us to overcome them, by the Grace of our inward Sanctifier, and preparing us daily for the Bleſſedneſs, to which he invites us. For ſuch Mercies we cannot but love him; and whoever doth ſo, is in Proportion beloved by him. The Senſe of this muſt give us great Compoſure about every Thing worldly, Diſdain of every Thing vicious, and Comfort in going through the very loweſt and hardeſt Acts of Duty. We ſhall paſs the Days of our Pilgrimage in as much Delight as the Nature

Nature of it affords: and when we come to our final Abode, every Capacity of ſpiritual Enjoyment, to which we have improved ourſelves here, ſhall be inconceivably augmented, and completely filled: we ſhall *be abundantly ſatisfied with the Fatneſs of God's Houſe, and drink of the River of his Pleaſures*[k]. *For in his Preſence is the Fullneſs of Joy, and at his right Hand there are Pleaſures for evermore*[l].

[k] Pſal. xxxvi. 8. [l] Pſal. xvi. 11.

SERMON VI.

HEB. xii. 2.

Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith: who, for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God.

DIRECTING our Eye is necessary for guiding our Steps; and therefore the Apostle here directs the Eye of our Mind to Jesus Christ: whom if we so contemplate, as to learn what he was, and expects us to be, Nothing will be wanting to carry us happily through the Journey of Life. And it may be useful to begin with considering his familiar Manifestation of himself on Earth, whence we shall naturally be led to consider his higher and more awful Glories.

Now in this lowest View, we shall find him

to

to have been the moſt amiable and the moſt venerable Perſon, beyond all Compariſon, that the World ever knew. Meditate only with ſerious Attention on the evidently artleſs Account given of him in the Goſpels, and you will ſee, with an Admiration continually increaſing, how perfect his Character was in every Point: how warm his Sentiments, yet how juſt his Notions, of Piety to his heavenly Father; how ſtrong and affectionate his Expreſſions of it; yet how rational, and how peculiarly ſuitable to his very peculiar Situation: how compoſed his Reſignation, though with the acuteſt Feeling of all that he underwent; and how firm his Truſt in God even at the Hour of Death, under the moſt painful Senſe of the Light of his Countenance being withdrawn from him: how regular his Practice of the Whole of Religion, yet how accurate his Preference of one Part of it to another: how active and bold and perſevering his Zeal; yet how completely free from all the Weakneſs, and all the Bitterneſs, with which Zeal is too often accompanied; how intimately tempered with Patience towards the ſlow of Apprehenſion; Eſteem for the well-meaning though erroneous; Pity for the bad, though

per-

perverſe and incorrigible: what perpetual Demonſtrations he gave, of Benevolence and Purity in his Teaching, of Goodneſs and Condeſcenſion, Meekneſs and Tenderneſs, in his Behaviour, to all Perſons, however provoking, on all Occaſions, however trying: yet Goodneſs judiciouſly exerciſed, Condeſcenſion with Dignity, Meekneſs with due Severity againſt Sin, Tenderneſs without Partiality, or improper Compliances, to the neareſt of his Kindred or the deareſt of his Diſciples: how compaſſionate a Love he ſhewed to his Country; yet how unlimited a Good-will to all the World: how remote he was from Self-indulgence, yet how far from encouraging uſeleſs Rigour and Auſterity: how diligently he turned the Thoughts of the Multitude, from empty Admiration of his Diſcourſes or his Works, to the conſcientious Performance of their own Duties; declined the moſt favourable Opportunities of riſing to worldly Power, and inculcated on his Followers the ſtrongeſt Warnings of what he and they were to ſuffer: with what Plainneſs he reproved both the People and their Rulers, yet with what Care he ſecured the Reſpect owing from the former to the latter: with what Simplicity and upright

Prudence

Prudence he anſwered the Objections and captious Queſtions levelled againſt him, however ſuddenly attacked by them; and, though in ſo public a Life tried every Way continually, never once was overcome, never once diſconcerted: how ſurpriſingly he avoided all the Artifices and all the Violence of his Enemies, as long as he choſe it; and how much ſuperior, not only to them, but, if poſſible, even to himſelf, he appeared, after he had put himſelf into their Hands, during the Whole of their barbarous and deſpiteful Treatment. Nor can it fail to be obſerved, as a moſt important Circumſtance, that all his wonderful Perfections were evidently natural to him, and ſat abſolutely eaſy upon him, without the leaſt Variation, or Inequality, or Effort exerted to raiſe himſelf up to, or ſupport, the higheſt Excellence, that he ever diſplayed. In ſhort, the Character of Jeſus Chriſt, like the Frame of God's Creation, the more deeply it is ſtudied, the more reſpectfully it will be admired. Some ſmall Particulars in each, yet much fewer than ſuperficial Obſervers imagine, it may be eaſier to cavil at, than to account for diſtinctly: but look at the Whole of either, and to every Eye that is capable of taking in a Whole,

it will approve itſelf uniformly great and good.

Now that he, of whom theſe Things are recorded, was a real Man, and not a Phantom of the Imagination, Infidelity itſelf hath never denied. And that he was truly the excellent Man, that the Goſpels deſcribe him to have been, we have the Teſtimony of Numbers that knew him, of more who converſed with thoſe that knew him; who all aſſerted it in the ſtrongeſt Terms, and ſuffered every Thing terrible for ſo doing. Their Enemies were never able to diſprove them: if they had, Chriſtianity muſt have ſunk: and indeed ſome of the moſt conſiderable of their Enemies, in all Ages, have owned them to be ſo far in the right. But if ſtill it be pretended, that his Portrait was drawn too favourably; who could draw it ſo? The *Greeks* and *Romans* never drew any, either from Life or Fancy, without ſome capital Fault. How came the *Jews*, how came the illiterate Evangeliſts, by ſuch extraordinary Skill? And further, how came they to aſcribe ſuch mild, ſuch paſſive Virtues, to their Meſſiah, whom the whole Nation expected to be, on the contrary, an enterprizing and proſperous Warrior? Had one of them deviated ſo unaccountably

accountably from the general Opinion; is it credible that they all ſhould? Had every one of them attempted to make a beautiful Picture of that Sort, without Regard to the Original; would all their Pictures have been like, yet each diſtinguiſhed by ſuch Peculiarities, as proved none of them to be copied from the other? Or ſuppoſing even that, could they have perſuaded an unwilling World, that theſe reſembled this Original, when plainly they did not?

Now if their Narratives be faithful Deſcriptions of a real Perſon, well may we aſk, as the *Jews* did with another Spirit, *Whence hath this Man theſe Things; and what Wiſdom is this, which is given unto him*[a]*? Is not this the Carpenter's Son*[b]*?* What Education had he to form him, what Patterns to form himſelf upon, to become the Man he was? By what Train of thinking could he be led to conceive, by what Proſpects could he be moved to undertake, by what Power was he enabled to accompliſh, the unparalleled Things he did? To imagine that ſuch a one exiſted by Accident, is monſtrouſly unreaſonable. But that he ſhould alſo have fallen by Accident, juſt into that

[a] Mark vi 2. [b] Matth. xiii. 55.

ſingle

ſingle Country, in which there was a Syſtem of Religion, that he could build on, with a Series of Predictions applicable to himſelf; and juſt at that Period too, which theſe Predictions had ſo pointed out, as to raiſe an univerſal Expectation of him: that under all the Diſadvantages of a low Condition he ſhould have Spirit enough to make and maintain the higheſt of Claims, Sagacity enough to interpret the ancient Oracles in a much ſublimer and juſter Senſe, than any of the moſt learned Inſtructors of the People, and Self-denial enough to prefer, in Conſequence of theſe Interpretations, Perſecution and Crucifixion before the Safety of a private Station, or the Splendor of offered Dominion: that every one of theſe Things (and others equally ſtrange might be added) ſhould meet in the ſame Man, without the ſpecial Appointment of Heaven, exceeds all Power of Chance. Conſider him only as a mere Man, he appears to have been unſpeakably the greateſt and beſt of Men. Conſider only thoſe Conſequences of his coming into the World, which even Unbelievers muſt acknowledge, he appears to be the moſt important Perſon, that ever did come into it. The general Reaſonableneſs of his Doctrine, the Coolneſs of his

Temper, the Compoſedneſs and Familiarity of his whole Converſation, prove he was no Enthuſiaſt: the unvaried Goodneſs of his Life, the Willingneſs with which he ſuffered Death, the Impoſſibility, which his Underſtanding could not but ſee, of attaining any worldly Advantage by the Courſe, which he took; nay indeed, the Difficulties which he left in ſome Articles of his Scheme, and needed not, if he had contrived it to ſerve a Turn, prove full as evidently, that he was no Impoſtor. What muſt he have been then? And what elſe can we gather from his whole Behaviour, than what the Spectators did from the finiſhing Scene of it upon the Croſs: *Truly this was the Son of God*[c]?

But if indeed a Title ſo tranſcendent belongs to *Jeſus*, we are ſurely bound to learn, with the utmoſt Docility, from the Scriptures written by his Direction, what it comprehends, and what is connected with it. There we read, that *in the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*[d]: that by him the Father created all Things, and by him hath conducted, ever ſince, the Concerns of this World; whence he is called, in the Text, *the Author and Finiſher of our Faith.*

[c] Matth. xxvii. 54. [d] John i. 1.

He

He laid the Ground-work of it immediately on the Fall of our first Parents, the Consequences of which we all feel, in the gracious Intimation given them, that *the Seed of the Woman*[e] shall destroy the Serpent's Power: and afterwards made valuable Additions to it of *precious Promises*[f] from Time to Time. When Idolatry and Vice had overspread the rest of the World; he preserved it with peculiar Care in one Nation, *as a Light shining in a dark Place*[g], for the Benefit of all, who would turn their Eyes towards it; and, by a Chain of wonderful Providences, brought on the proper Season for diffusing it throughout the Earth. Then he divested himself of *the Glory, which he had with the Father before the World was*[h]; *the Word became Flesh, and dwelt among st us*[i]: taught Men in Person the great Truths of Religion, confirmed them by beneficent Miracles performed, and illustrious Prophecies fulfilled; exemplified them, as I have said, in his Practice; and provided the Means of their descending uncorrupted to all future Ages, and being efficaciously applied to the Conviction of the wicked, and the Comfort of the good. So

[e] Gen. iii. 15. [f] 2 Pet. i. 4. [g] Verse 19.
[h] John xvii. 5. [i] John i. 14.

fully is he, and he could not be more fully, what the Apoſtle calls him: who next reminds us, that in carrying on this inconceivably kind Work, he willingly underwent all Manner of ill Uſage, and at length *endured* the Pain, and *deſpiſed the Shame, of the Croſs*, inflicted on him by Wretches, for whom his Precepts were too holy, and his Life too harmleſs; that ſo he might demonſtrate his Sincerity, and ſet a Pattern of doing the hardeſt Things, which he taught. Nay, he ſubmitted farther, to become the Repreſentative of Tranſgreſſors; to be forſaken of God, and have his Soul made ſorrowful unto Death, in that myſterious Diſpenſation of laying on him the Iniquities of us all: in order to give the moſt tremendous Proof of the Heinouſneſs of Sin; that ſuch a one as he ſhould ſuffer ſo much, to induce the juſt and wiſe, though equally merciful, Ruler of all to forgive it, and engage and enable the guilty to forſake it.

Theſe Things he did, the Text goes on to ſay, *for the Joy that was ſet before him:* the Joy of illuſtrating at once the Holineſs and Goodneſs of God, who appointed and accepted this Method of our Salvation; the Joy of reforming and making happy, in themſelves and

and one another, in Time and to Eternity, all those Multitudes, who in every Generation should embrace his Offers; and lastly, the Joy of being deservedly honoured, as the blessed Instrument of these inestimable Benefits.

Accordingly he hath the Honour, as the Apostle proceeds to observe, of sitting down at the right Hand of the Throne of God: being placed, in Respect of that Nature which he condescended to assume, and the Sufferings of which are thus properly rewarded, in a State of supreme Felicity, at the Head of the whole Creation, *Angels and Authorities being made subject unto him*[k]. And in this exalted Station he shall remain, superintending the Affairs of the Universe, till he returns to our Earth at the Day of Judgment. Then *every Eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him*[l], they which blaspheme him, and they which, professing, yet *obey not his Gospel: who shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, when he shall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*[m]:

This then is he, to whom we are directed to look: to *look off*; for so the Word signifies,

[k] 1 Pet. iii. 22. [l] Rev. i. 7. [m] 2 Thess. i. 8, 9, 10.

from other Objects, unſafe or unworthy, and contemplate him: not only as the moſt excellent of Men, but a Being raiſed *far above every Name that is named*, either *in this World, or that which is to come*[n]: nor only as thus eminent in himſelf, but as our greateſt Benefactor and trueſt Friend; our wiſe Lawgiver and ſpotleſs Example; the Sacrifice by whoſe Blood we are waſhed from our Sins; the Head of the Body, of which we are Members; the Judge, on whoſe Sentence our everlaſting State depends: our Prophet, our Prieſt and our King; our Saviour, *our Lord and our God*[o].

Surely of ſuch a one it ſeems impoſſible to think lowly: and almoſt unavoidable to think often and much. Yet were we to examine ourſelves, how frequently or how ſeldom we recollect his Perfections, and our moſt intereſting Relations to him; whether we are ſtrongly or ſlightly affected by them; whether we principally attend to his Rules of Life, or thoſe which are ſuggeſted by inconſiderate Cuſtom, vicious Inclination, or vain Self-Opinion, falſely called Reaſon; whether, even if we mean to do well, we pray with Humility for his Grace, or truſt our own imagined

[n] Eph. i. 21. [o] John xx. 28.

Strength; and laſtly, whether after *doing all* we can, we rely on his Merits, as *unprofitable Servants* [p], or hope for Salvation by our own ſinful good Deeds; what Anſwer muſt the Conſciences of many of us make? Such undoubtedly as will at leaſt evidence the Need of fixing our Thoughts upon him much more ſteadily, than we have done; of ſtirring up in our Hearts the warmeſt Sentiments of Reverence, Gratitude and Love towards him; (for who can be equally intitled to them, or what Employment ſo delightful or beneficial?) and of exerting them in every Act, which he hath appointed, or his Followers found ſerviceable. External Acts of themſelves indeed are Nothing: but when they proceed from a good Principle within, and are choſen and uſed with Diſcretion, they keep up the Vigour of the Mind, and ſtrengthen good Habits inexpreſſibly. The Importance of them in civil Affairs is every where acknowledged: and how can we fancy it to be leſs in religious? Therefore if indeed we honour our Redeemer, we muſt ſhew that we honour his Sacraments, his Ordinances, the weekly, the yearly Days conſecrated to him, the Places of his Worſhip: permit me to

[p] Luke xvii. 10.

add, his Miniſters, only being careful to diſtinguiſh, for the Sake of our Maſter and of Mankind, the devout, the laborious, the diſintereſted, from the Lovers of Pleaſure or Gain, of Power or Applauſe, from the formal, the thoughtleſs, the lukewarm.

Nor will he, whoſe Reſpect to *the Author and Finiſher of our Faith* is real, either ſeek or wiſh to ſhelter himſelf from infidel Scorn by leaving the Motives of his Conduct in religious Matters doubtful: but openly, though decently, make it known to all Men, of which Side he in Truth is; and do at leaſt as much for the Cauſe of God, as he could with Propriety for any other, that he hath at Heart: recollecting that thus the pious will be animated, the Oppoſers ſtaggered, the indolent awakened; and likewiſe, that them only *who confeſs him before Men, will Jeſus confeſs before his Father which is in Heaven*[q].

But Zeal for his Miſſion and Doctrines will be of no Avail, without Imitation of his Example and Obedience to his Laws. As on the one Hand, the Virtue which Men profeſs without Religion, the Religion which they profeſs without Chriſtianity, the Chriſtianity which

[q] Matth. x. 32.

they

they profeſs without Affection to Chriſt, is eſſentially imperfect, and moſtly nominal; they model it into what they pleaſe, and it waſtes away to Nothing: ſo on the other, not only hypocritical, but partial, Attachment to him, Fondneſs for him as the Obtainer of Pardon and future Happineſs, and Slight of him as the Director of Life; hoping to be ſaved by Faith without Works, or waiting for his Grace to amend us without taking Pains to amend ourſelves; theſe Things *put* his Goſpel and *him to open Shame*[r]. We muſt *look unto Jeſus*, as our Exemplar and Legiſlator: elſe we ſhall look to him in vain as our Saviour.

Some of his Actions indeed were appropriated to his Office; and ſome of his Precepts, to that of his Apoſtles. But whatever was temporary or ſingular in either, is eaſily diſcerned, and the reſt binds us all. Therefore we muſt *learn of him* to be *meek and lowly: for ſo ſhall we find Reſt for our Souls*[s]. We muſt condeſcend, when Occaſion requires, to the meaneſt Inſtances of mutual Service: for *our Maſter and Lord waſhed his Diſciples Feet, that they ſhould do as he had done to them*[t]. We muſt take the moſt injurious Provocations patiently;

[r] Heb. vi. 6. [s] Matth. xi. 29. [t] John xiii. 5, 13, 15.

for he, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously* [u]. We must *forgive one another, as God for Christ's Sake* is ready to *forgive us* [w]. We must *speak the Truth every Man with his Neighbour* [x], for there *was no Guile found in his Mouth* [y]. We must be *harmless and undefiled, separate from Sinners* [z], in our Temper and Practice, even when obliged to be most in their Company; for so was he, conversing with them, as a Physician with the sick. In a Word, *the same Mind* must *be in us, which was in Christ Jesus* [a] our Lord.

And we must not only avoid gross Transgressions and Omissions; but *purify ourselves as he is pure* [b], and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God* [c]. Ambition, Worldliness, Delicacy, Voluptuousness, Dissipation, Eagerness for Amusements and Trifles, are utterly beneath us, and unsuitable to our Profession. A Christian is a Character of Dignity: and though he submits with a graceful Willingness to whatever his Condition here demands; yet he *sets his Affection* only *on the Things above* [d]; and from

[u] 1 Pet. ii. 23. [w] Eph. iv. 32. [x] Eph. iv. 25.
[y] 1 Pet. ii. 22. [z] Heb. vii. 26. [a] Phil. ii. 5.
[b] 1 John iii. 3. [c] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [d] Col. iii. 2.

the

the View of his Redeemer placed there at the right Hand of God, draws his Directions for his Conduct below: reasoning with St. *Paul*, *The Love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again*[e].

Such as are duly moved by this Consideration will faithfully perform, not only the general Duties of Life, but the particular ones of their Rank and Circumstances. Persons in Authority will reflect, that he who is *Lord of Lords*[f], and *the Prince of the Kings of the Earth*[g], hath deputed them for a Work, similar to his own final one, *the Punishment of Evil-doers, and the Praise of them that do well*[h]; and consequently will inform themselves concerning both. *He needed not*, when upon Earth, *that any should testify of Man; for he knew what was in Man*[i]. But sagacious Inquiry and strict Observation are necessary for their executing that noble Plan, which *David* hath laid down for them in the 101st Psalm. Happy the Nation, where it is pursued with Gentleness and

[e] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.
[f] Rev. xvii. 14.
[g] Rev. i. 5,
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 14.
[i] John ii. 25.

Candor,

Candor, yet with Spirit and Efficacy, that the ill-inclined *may hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously*[k].

Again: the Ministers of the Gospel, if they look unto and *love the Lord Jesus in Sincerity*[l], will imitate his Assiduity in giving Instruction, his Compassion to Penitents, his plain Denunciations against obstinate Sinners, his Contempt of unjust Reproach, yet his Caution to guard against needless Offence: will accommodate their Discourses, as he did, to the Wants, the Dispositions, the Capacities of their Hearers; *condescending* in this and all Things *to Men of low Estate*[m]: will remember, that *his Kingdom is not of this World*[n], and use whatever Advantages they enjoy in it, to the Purposes of the next: be in every good Sense, as he was, but in no bad one, *the Friends of Publicans and Sinners*[o]; neither act *as being Lords over God's Heritage, but Ensamples to the Flock, that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they may receive a Crown of Glory*[p]. *Wherefore holy Brethren, Partakers of the heavenly Calling, consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our Profession*[q].

[k] Deut. xvii. 13. [l] Eph. vi. 24. [m] Rom. xii. 16.
[n] John xviii. 36. [o] Matth. xi. 19. [p] 1 Pet. v. 3, 4.
[q] Heb. iii. 1.

Further

Further yet: those who have large Incomes, if they fix their Thoughts on him, *who for our Sakes became poor, that we, through his Poverty, might become rich* [r] *in good Works* [s] and heavenly Treasures, will be powerfully excited not to place their Happiness, either in the Acquisition or Possession of Wealth, or the Enjoyment of any of those Pleasures which Wealth can help to procure: but in doing Good, as the blessed *Jesus* did, and benefiting their *Brethren for whom he died* [t]. To do this more effectually, they will set an Example of prudent Self-restraint and Frugality, which may preserve Multitudes of others, if not themselves, from Follies and Distresses: they will employ what is thus saved in Acts of judicious Charity; and have constantly in their Minds what many, who are extremely liberal, strangely forget, that all Expences, and seeming Bounties, which tend to corrupt Morals, are mischievous; and using Methods to make Men pious and virtuous, providing for their Souls at the same Time with their Bodies, which our Saviour did continually, conduces beyond all Things even to their present Welfare.

[r] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [s] 1 Tim. vi. 18. [t] Rom. xiv. 10, 15.

Lastly,

Lastly, they who are afflicted, (and who is not often so in one Respect or another?) if they dwell, as the Text was meant to advise them particularly, on the Contemplation of our compassionate High-Priest, *the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*[u], will learn from him to endure *all the Contradiction of Sinners*, and all *the heavy Yoke* that is laid *on the Sons of Adam*[w], Disesteem, Ingratitude, Perverseness, Insolence, Disappointment, Poverty, Pain and Death, without being *weary or faint in their Minds*[x]. He, though faultless, endured much more than we Sinners shall be called to: under every Trial *his Grace will be sufficient for us*[y]: *if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him*[z]; the more we undergo, the greater will be our Reward: and what have we then to resent or fear or be dejected about, or whom to envy? Miserable Comforts are all the worldly Means, by which Men labour in vain to deceive themselves, and mitigate their Wretchedness, compared with the *everlasting Consolation and good Hope, which our Lord Jesus Christ hath given us*[a], whose Words are, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my Throne; even as I also over-*

[u] Is. liii. 3. [w] Ecclus. xl. 1. [x] Heb. xii. 3.
[y] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [z] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [a] 2 Thess. ii. 16.

came,

came, and am set down with my Father in his Throne [b].

Let every one therefore of every Degree *fight the good Fight of Faith, and lay hold on eternal Life, whereunto he is called* [c]: for these are *not cunningly devised Fables* [d], but *the true Sayings of God* [e]. They who have hitherto lived in Sin, (and so far we all have, that *by* his Obedience to *the Law no Man is justified in the Sight of God* [f]) let them *flee* to the merciful Jesus *from the Wrath to come* [g], *acquaint themselves with him, and be at Peace* [h]. They that once had a Sense of Religion, but *have left their first Love* [i], drawn away by vicious Indulgences, or temporal Interests, or *the Instruction that causeth to err from the Words of Knowledge* [k], let them remember from whence they are *fallen, and repent, and do their first Works* [l]. They, who have hitherto persevered in Piety, let them form in themselves, as they will always have Room and Need, a still completer Image of Christ. And let us all incessantly study to acquire that constant, that affectionate and influencing Attention to him, for which St. *Peter* celebrates the early Christi-

[b] Rev. iii. 21.
[c] 1 Tim. vi. 12.
[d] 2 Pet. i. 16.
[e] Rev. xix. 9.
[f] Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11.
[g] Matth. iii. 7.
[h] Job xxii. 21.
[i] Rev. ii. 4.
[k] Prov. xix. 27.
[l] Rev. ii. 5.

ans,

ans, when he saith, *Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory, receiving the End of your Faith, even the Salvation of your Souls* [m].

[m] 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

SER-

SERMON VII.

1 Cor. i. 22, 23, 24.

For the Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks ſeek after Wiſdom;

But we preach Chriſt crucified: unto the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks Fooliſhneſs;

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Chriſt, the Power of God, and the Wiſdom of God.

TO expect eternal Life through a Saviour who died for us, is the fundamental Doctrine of the Chriſtian Profeſſion: the Article, that diſtinguiſhes our Faith from all others, and with which our Religion ſtands or falls. The New Teſtament therefore dwells much on the Importance of this Belief: and eſpecially the Epiſtles of St. *Paul* inculcate it every where. He *determined*, though a Man of extenſive

Knowledge, *not to know any Thing among* thoſe whom he inſtructed, to inſiſt on no Subject, comparatively ſpeaking, *ſave Chriſt Jeſus, and him crucified*[a]. Still both he, and the reſt of the Apoſtles, muſt plainly foreſee, and they quickly experienced, as the Preachers of the Goſpel have done ever ſince, that the Prejudices of many, and the Pride of all Men, would find much Difficulty in ſubmitting to owe their Salvation to another; eſpecially to one, who had lived ſo poor a Life, and ſuffered ſo diſgraceful a Death; which would all be avoided by teaching them to aſcribe the whole Merit of it to themſelves. But *they had not ſo learned Chriſt*[b], as to *handle the Word of God deceitfully*[c]. They knew, that what ſeemed to human Vanity weak and ill-judged, was the true and only Way to heavenly Happineſs. And therefore, though *the Jews required a Sign*, &c.

In diſcourſing on theſe Words, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. What it is to *preach Chriſt crucified.*

II. Whence it came to paſs, that this was *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Fooliſhneſs.*

III. That, notwithſtanding, it places in a

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [b] Eph. iv. 20. [c] 2 Cor. iv. 2.

ſtrong

ſtrong Light both *the Power and the Wiſdom of God.*

I. What it is to *preach Chriſt crucified.* Now this, in one Word, is to lay before Men the Nature and Terms of that *eternal Salvation*, of which, by his ſuffering on the Croſs, he is *become the Author unto all that obey him*[d]. More particularly it is to inſtruct them in the following great Truths: that there ever hath, doth, and will exiſt, one infinite Being, perfectly wiſe, juſt and good, the almighty Maker and Ruler of the Univerſe; who created Man for the Practice of Piety and Virtue, and for the Enjoyment of everlaſting Life: that our firſt Parents, by wilfully tranſgreſſing a moſt equitable Command of his, forfeited their Title to Immortality, diſordered the Frame of their Bodies and Minds, and derived to us the ſame corrupt and mortal Nature, to which they had reduced themſelves: that being in this Condition through their Fault, all Men ſunk into a ſtill worſe, by committing many Sins, which, however prone to them, they might have had the Means of avoiding; and thus have deſerved Puniſhment here and hereafter: that, Wickedneſs prevailing early, and ſpreading wide in the World, firſt

[d] Heb. v. 9.

the Practice, then the Knowledge, both of true Religion and moral Virtue, were in a great Measure loſt out of it: but that the unſpeakable Mercy and Wiſdom of the Supreme Being provided a Remedy for theſe Evils, intimated in general Terms to the earlieſt Offenders, promiſed more diſtinctly in the ſucceeding Ages, and actually given *when the* proper *Fulneſs of Time came* [e]; which Remedy was this. A Perſon, made known under the Character of the only-begotten Son of God, and one with the Father in a Manner to us incomprehenſible, after teaching Mankind from the Beginning by various other Methods, took upon him our Nature, was born of a Virgin, and dwelt on Earth, to teach us perſonally by his Word and Example: condeſcended, for this compaſſionate Purpoſe, to all the Inconveniences of the preſent State of Things, to numberleſs Indignities and Sufferings, and laſtly to have his Life taken away by the Hands of wicked Men; *humbling himſelf unto Death, even the Death of the Croſs* [f], uſually inflicted on none but the vileſt and loweſt of Malefactors. In Conſideration of this meritorious Goodneſs of his, which he engaged, before the World began, thus to manifeſt, the

[e] Gal. iv. 4. [f] Phil. ii. 8.

moſt

moſt High eſtabliſhed with him a Covenant of Grace and Favour, by which *all Power in Heaven and Earth was given him*[g]; and Proviſion was made, that whoever ſhould ſincerely repent of the Sins which he had committed, and throw himſelf on the promiſed Mercy of God; whether as more obſcurely notified before the Redeemer's Incarnation, or more clearly afterwards; taking the Word of Truth for the Law of his Life, and faithfully endeavouring to obey it, ſhould not only have Pardon for his paſt Tranſgreſſions, however heinous, but the Aſſiſtance of the divine Spirit to preſerve him from future ones: that a kind Providence ſhould turn every Thing to his Good, which befell him in this World, and endleſs Felicity be his Portion in the next. But then it was alſo denounced, that whoever ſhould either ſlight theſe Offers when duly made; or, profeſſing to accept them, live unſuitably to them, Chriſt ſhould be of no Benefit to ſuch; they ſhould remain in their Sins, with this heavy Aggravation of their Guilt, that they had rejected the Counſel of God for their Salvation; and when *Light was come into the World, loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil*[h].

[g] Matth. xxviii. 18. [h] John iii. 19.

This is, in brief, the Doctrine of Chriſt crucified. The main Parts of it, you ſee, are two: God's Goodneſs to us, and our Duty to him; and if either be omitted, Men are not *taught as the Truth is in Jeſus*[i]. Inſiſting on moral Duties only, is overlooking the greateſt of all Duties, Piety. Inſiſting on the Duties of natural Religion only, is injuriouſly deſpiſing thoſe of Revelation, which the ſame Authority hath enjoined. And laying before Men all the Commandments of God, only omitting to ſay, how they ſhall be enabled to perform them, and how they ſhall procure their Performances, faulty as the beſt of them are, to be accepted, is failing them in Points of the moſt abſolute Neceſſity.

But then, on the other Hand, ſpeaking of Nothing, but Chriſt and his Grace, is concealing what *the Grace of God appeared unto all Men to teach them: that denying Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, they ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent World*[k]. It is not therefore naming Chriſt ever ſo often, or exalting his Compaſſion to the fallen Race of *Adam* ever ſo much, or deſcribing his dreadful Sufferings ever ſo movingly, that is, preaching him as we

[i] Eph. iv. 21. [k] Tit. ii. 11, 12.

ought,

ought, if all be not directed to make us become like him. His own Sermon on the Mount is almoſt entirely filled with Precepts of Duty; of the common Duties of common Life. And ſo may other Sermons too, yet be truly Chriſtian, even without mentioning Chriſt expreſsly, provided the Neceſſity of his Aid and his Merits be underſtood throughout them; and the great Deſign of his coming, the Reformation of the Hearts and Lives of Men, be cloſely purſued in them. Thus then judge of our Diſcourſes: and, which is of more Importance, thus judge of your own Improvement. It is neither talking nor thinking highly of Chriſt, nor being affected in the tendereſt Manner with his bitter Paſſion and dying Love, that conſtitutes a Believer in him, ſuch as he will finally own: but *herein* may *we have Boldneſs in the Day of Judgement*, if, *as he was, ſo are we in this World*[l].

Yet ſtill the Sacrifice of him, *as a Lamb without Blemiſh*[m], for our Sins, the Need we had of it, and the Benefits we receive from it, are ſuch capital and indiſpenſable Articles, that every Preacher, who doth not frequently return to them, is without Excuſe: and every Profeſſor

[l] 1 John iv. 17. [m] 1 Pet. i. 19.

of Christianity, who doth not *live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him, frustrates his Grace* [n], and will *come short of his Glory* [o]. Accordingly, though St. *Paul* himself hath considerable Parts of Chapters, in which little, if any Thing, is said of our Saviour; yet all prepares the Way for introducing him again; all points our Eye to him; all makes Part of that Building, *the Corner Stone* of which *is Jesus Christ* [p].

Having thus explained, what *preaching Christ crucified* is, I proceed to shew,

II. Why this Doctrine was *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness:* which the Words of the Text, when unfolded, will tell us plainly. *The Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom.*

The former had been delivered from the Bondage of *Egypt by Signs and Wonders, by a mighty Hand and a stretched out Arm* [q]. A glorious Appearance of God upon Mount *Sinai* had accompanied the Promulgation of their Law: his visible Presence had dwelt with them, first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple: his miraculous Interpositions had given, preserved,

[n] Gal. ii. 20, 21. [o] Rom. iii. 23. [p] Eph. ii. 20.
[q] Deut. iv. 34. v. 15.

and

and restored to them the Land of *Canaan*, with much earthly Prosperity. These Blessings had so powerfully struck the Imaginations of a gross and carnal People, that they paid in general but little Attention to any that were not of a temporal Nature. And therefore whenever their Prophets foretold the Coming of the promised Redeemer, they were obliged, unless they would have their Predictions despised and forgotten, to describe him in Terms, literally denoting worldly Grandeur: as *ruling in the Midst of his Enemies*, *judging among the Heathen* [r], and *higher than the Kings of the Earth* [s]. They did however join to these Descriptions such Circumstances, as sufficiently determined their Words to a spiritual Meaning. But still the other, being far more agreeable, was always uppermost in the Thoughts of the *Jews:* and they would image to themselves the expected Son of *David*, as a mighty Conqueror, who should prove himself the true Messiah by supernatural Assistances from above, enabling him to exert a more than human Force against the Nations, which held them in Subjection, and extend the *Jewish* Empire over the Globe.

In this Sense it was, that they *required a*

[r] Ps. cx. 2, 6. [s] Ps. lxxxix. 27.

Sign.

Sign [t]. Other Signs of his Miſſion our Saviour had ſhewn without Number: but ſtill they demand to *ſee a Sign from Heaven* [u]. Every Miracle is a Sign from Heaven, had they conſidered rightly. But the Sign, on which their Hearts were ſet, was that in the Book of *Daniel:* when the *Son of Man ſhould come with the Clouds of Heaven, and be brought near to the Ancient of Days; and have given to him Dominion and Glory, and a Kingdom, that all People, Nations and Languages ſhould ſerve him* [w]. Our Saviour obſerved their Miſtake, and told them, that the Sign, which they deſired, ſhould indeed be *given*, but *not to that Generation:* that the principal Evidence, to be afforded them, was *the Sign of the Prophet Jonas* [x]: the Reſurrection of *Jeſus* the third Day from the Grave, as *Jonas* roſe from the Depth of the Sea. To following Ages farther Signs were to be vouchſafed in their Order: the Dominion, which they expected to ſee eſtabliſhed at once, was deſigned to take Place

[t] And a Sign of this Sort they expected, even when the Temple was burnt by the *Romans*. For that very Day a falſe Prophet aſſured the People, ως ο Θεος επι το ιερον αναβηναι κελευει, δειξομενος τα σημεια της σωτηριας. Joſeph. B. I. l. 6. c. 5. § 2. Ed. Haverc. In a few Lines after, he ſtiles this, τερασμενην την απο τε Θεε βοηθειαν.

[u] Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. Luke xi. 16.

[w] Dan. vii. 13, 14. [x] Matth. xii. 39.

by

by Degrees, over the Souls and Conſciences of Men, not their Bodies and Fortunes merely: and in this nobleſt Senſe, *the Kingdoms of this World were to become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt*[y]. But at Length the Time will come for a yet more awful Diſplay of his regal Power, in the laſt Judgement: and then ſhall they, who were ſo prematurely impatient for a Sign from Heaven, *ſee*, before they wiſh it, *the Sign of the Son of Man coming in the Clouds, with Power and great Glory*[z].

But ſuch Repreſentations were likely to have little Effect on ſuch Minds. One, who ſhould *at that Time reſtore again the Kingdom to Iſrael*[a], was what the whole People wanted. And when they not only beheld the Meanneſs of our Saviour's Appearance, and heard the Meekneſs of his Doctrine, but ſaw how carefully he avoided the Opportunities of obtaining an earthly Kingdom, the leading Part of the Nation immediately denied him. But when he was arraigned and condemned, and ſuffered the Death of a Slave; then the Faith, even of his Apoſtles, almoſt died with him. *We truſted*, ſay two of his Diſciples, as if now all Hope was at an End, *we truſted, that it had*

[y] Rev. xi. 15. [z] Matth. xxiv. 30. [a] Acts i. 6.

been

been he which ſhould have redeemed Iſrael [b]. It is true, they recovered themſelves: but the greater Part of the *Jews* did not: and a crucified Redeemer continues *a Stumbling-block* to them; or, in the Words of *Simeon*, a *Sign ſpoken againſt, ſet for the Fall and Riſing again of many in Iſrael* [c]: indeed for the utter Fall of that Church and Nation, till the Seaſon foretold ſhall come, for which Providence hath left Room, by the wonderful Preſervation of this one and only People diſtinct from all others for ſo many Ages, when by *looking on him whom they have pierced, and mourning* [d], they ſhall riſe again, and be as *Life from the dead* [e].

As for the *Greeks*, or Gentiles, they did not object to the Goſpel, that the Authority of it wanted the Proof of Signs from Heaven; but that the Preaching of it wanted the Recommendation of what they called *Wiſdom*. Neither the Manner of the Apoſtles Teaching was adorned with that plauſible Oratory, of which they were ſo fond; which ſoothed the Ears, and entertained the Imagination; which could make a bad Cauſe victorious, and a good one ſuſpected: nor yet was the Matter of their Diſcourſe made up of curious Specula-

[b] Luke xxiv. 21. [c] Luke ii. 34. [d] Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 37. [e] Rom. xi. 15.

tions,

tions, abſtruſe Points in Philoſophy debated with Acuteneſs, Theories, built upon ſlender Foundations to great Heights, then attacked with ſubtle Objections, and defended with more ſubtle Refinements. Theſe were the Delights of the learned *Greeks:* who, as St. *Paul* and indeed their own Writers obſerve particularly of *the Athenians, ſpent their Time in Nothing elſe, but either to tell or to hear ſome new Thing* [f]. Immediately therefore, when he had begun to preach in that City, they apply to him with great Eagerneſs: *May we know, what this new Doctrine, whereof thou ſpeakeſt, is* [g]? But when they found no ſuch Gratification of their Fancy as they expected; but a grave Reproof of their favourite Superſtitions, a ſerious Call to Repentance, a ſolemn Denunciation of a future Recompence; and the Foundation of theſe diſagreeable Doctrines laid in a mere Fact, which was contrary to all their Schemes and Syſtems, that *God would judge the World in Righteouſneſs by that Man, whom he had ordained, whereof he had given Aſſurance to all Men, in that he had raiſed him from the dead: ſome,* we read, *mocked;* and of thoſe, who ſaid more civilly, that *they would hear him*

[f] Acts xvii. 21. [g] Verſe 19.

again

again of that Matter [h], we have no Cauſe to believe, that many did. Nor would the principal *Romans* afford to our holy Faith more Attention. For when St. *Paul* was arguing before *Agrippa*, being a *Jew*, from the Prophets, that *Chriſt was to ſuffer and riſe again*; *Feſtus*, the Governor, inſtantly interrupted him: *Paul, thou art beſide thyſelf; much Learning doth make thee mad* [i].

This was the Treatment, which Men, *wiſe in their own Conceits* [k], and bigotted to their own Opinions, gave the Goſpel of Chriſt. Its Doctrines had Nothing amuſing to Minds full of trifling Curioſity: its Precepts had many Things diſguſting to human Senſuality and Pride: its Proofs were inconſiſtent with their prevailing Notions. So it was rejected without Examination by Perſons, whom the Irony of *Job* ſuits perfectly well: *no Doubt, but ye are the People: and Wiſdom ſhall die with you* [l]. It ought to ſurprize no one, that this Sort of Men, who have always been too common in the World, and never more than now, ſhould ſcorn Chriſtianity: while they continue ſuch as they are, they cannot embrace it.

[h] Acts xvii. 31, 32. [i] Acts xxvi. 23, 24. [k] Rom. xii. 16. [l] Job xii. 2.

But,

But, God be thanked, there have ever been ſome of more equitable Diſpoſitions: and to theſe it hath conſtantly appeared in that Light, which the Text expreſſes,

III. *But unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Chriſt the Power of God and the Wiſdom of God.* They who would ſuffer the Voice of Reaſon and Revelation to call upon them, and would attend to the Call, quickly diſcovered, under the Meanneſs of Chriſt's Appearance, divine Power; and under the Plainneſs of his Doctrine, divine Wiſdom.

The *Jews* had no Cauſe to expect military Exploits, miraculous Victories, and outward Splendor in their Meſſiah. Their own Prophets had foretold, that he was to *come to them lowly and meek*[m]; *to be deſpiſed and rejected of Men, to pour out his Soul unto Death an Offering for Sin, and make Interceſſion for the Tranſgreſſors*[n]. Of other Sorts of Miracles they had many more, performed by him and his Diſciples, than by *Moſes* and the Prophets. If his Death, for Want of knowing the Scriptures, appeared an Objection; his riſing again, and Aſcenſion into Heaven, was a full Proof of his Authority. If he brought them no Deliverance

[m] Zech. ix. 9. Matth. xxi. 5. [n] Iſ. liii.

from their temporal Enemies; yet he freed them from infinitely more formidable ones, from Sin and Guilt and the Wrath of God; and inſtead of a ſhort-lived Tyranny over the Nations of the Earth, he obtained for them an eternal Triumph over Death and Hell; and *made them Kings and Prieſts unto God, to reign with him for ever and ever*[o]. Thus was he, in much the moſt important Senſe, *the Power of God unto Salvation*[p]: and his real Greatneſs exceeded all that they looked for, unſpeakably more, than his viſible Appearance fell beneath it.

As to the Defect of that Wiſdom, which the *Greeks* required in the Goſpel: it had not indeed *the Wiſdom of this World*, or of the vain *Diſputers of this World*[q], who *profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe became Fools*[r]: but, void as it appears of Argumentation and Ornament, every ſingle Truth, that can lead Men to Virtue and Happineſs, is taught in it much more fully and convincingly, than in all the preceding Inſtitutions either of Philoſophy or Religion. The Being, Attributes and Providence of God, the Apoſtles proved, were *clearly ſeen, being*

[o] Rev. i. 6. v. 10. xx. 6. xxii. 5. [p] Rom. i. 16.
[q] 1 Cor. i. 20. [r] Rom. i. 22.

underſtood

understood by the Things that were made[s]: the Nature and Obligation of Piety and Morals, the Forgiveneſs of Sins upon Repentance, the inward Aſſiſtance of divine Grace, the future Happineſs of the good, and Puniſhment of the bad, theſe Things they did not ingeniouſly harangue upon, after the beloved Manner of the *Greeks*, and leave them in the ſame Uncertainty in which they found them, but gave for their Aſſertions concerning them, the irrefragable Teſtimony of Miracles which muſt proceed from the Almighty; and ſome of them ſuch as, in their Opinion, even the Almighty was unable to perform. For that *God* himſelf *ſhould raiſe the dead, was thought a Thing incredible with them*[t]. But as no juſt Reaſoning can ſhew it to be impoſſible, it is more certainly his Work for being beyond our Comprehenſion. And this is that undeniable *Demonſtration of the Spirit and of Power*, which infinitely excells all *the enticing Words of Man's Wiſdom*[u], not only in the Strength of its Evidence, but the Efficacy of its Influence too. For after the deepeſt Philoſophers, and moſt florid Orators had wearied themſelves for Ages

[s] Rom. i. 20. [t] Acts xxvi. 8. [u] 1 Cor. ii. 4.

in framing elaborate Diſcourſes about Religion and Virtue, without being able to ſet up the true Profeſſion of either, ſo much as in a ſingle Village; the unlearned Diſciples of Chriſt laid, in a few Years, ſuch Foundations of both throughout the World, as have ſupported them to this Day, and ever will. *For the Fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than Men, and the Weakneſs of God is ſtronger than Men*[w].

Since therefore the Whole of the Goſpel is ſo firmly proved, and moſt Parts of it ſo evidently rational, and no Part of it evidently otherwiſe; be we ever ſo incapable of penetrating into the Depths of ſome Doctrines, and the Reaſons of ſome Proceedings, yet well may it become us to think, that he, who ſees all Things, may eaſily ſee many, which we do not; and to reverence *the Wiſdom of God in a Myſtery, even the hidden Wiſdom which he ordained before the World, unto our Glory*[x]. Whether Sinners could be ſaved no other Way, than by the Death of his Son; or why, if they could, he hath preferred that to the reſt; we have no Right to aſk. What he hath choſen, we might be ſure is beſt, even did no Reaſon at all for it appear. But he hath made known

[w] 1 Cor. 1. 25. [x] 1 Cor. ii. 7.

ſeveral

ſeveral to us: ſome clearly, ſome *as through a Glaſs darkly*[y]; but the obſcureſt of them all to be contemplated with awful Reſpect.

By his eternal Son, God made the World, and hath adminiſtered it from the Beginning. He therefore was plainly the fit Perſon to conduct the moſt important of all its Affairs, the Recovery of Mankind from Sin and Miſery; *that in all Things*, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *he might have the Pre-eminence, and in him all Fulneſs dwell*[z]. In Order to recover and reform Men, he muſt inſtruct them: and doing it himſelf was unqueſtionably the moſt efficacious Method. But how muſt he come to do it? Had he appeared in a Station of Power and Wealth; many would have been ready to pay Court to him: but few, to obey his Precepts from the Heart. Even in his low Eſtate, ſome followed him a while, merely for the Loaves. And how much more Hypocriſy, a very improper Qualification for the Kingdom of Righteouſneſs, would there have been amongſt his Hearers, had the Circumſtances of the Teacher been more inviting! And how unſurmountable a Diſgrace might they have

[y] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [z] See Col. i. 13—20.

brought upon his whole Undertaking in its very Infancy, inſtead of the Honour and Support which it received from the unimpeached Integrity of its firſt afflicted Profeſſors!

But further: Nothing enforces Precepts, like Example. Now what Example could the Meſſias have ſet, in the Midſt of worldly Pomp and Grandeur? A very uſeful one certainly in ſome Points to ſome of his chief Officers, and others about his Perſon: but removed from the Sight, and unſuitable to the Condition of the Bulk of Mankind: whereas in the Sort of Life, which he choſe, an extremely public, though a mean one, he was a daily and familiar Pattern to all Men, of the moſt general and difficult Virtues: of Condeſcenſion, Diſintereſtedneſs, and Delight to do Good; of Indifference to worldly Enjoyments, Compoſedneſs under Contempt, Meekneſs under malicious Provocations, and Reſignation to God's Will under the bittereſt Sufferings of every Kind. Theſe Things, moſt of us, in one Part or another of our Pilgrimage, have Need to practiſe: and we find them ſo hard to learn, that the Encouragement of his having done and born much more than he requires of us, and the Aſſurance,

ance, that *having been tempted* himſelf, he will *ſuccour us when we are tempted*[a], will, in a Time of Trial, be Bleſſings unſpeakable.

Then conſider beſides, how great a Confirmation his Humility and Patience add to the other Proofs of his Authority. A Claim to worldly Power, by Virtue of a divine Commiſſion, raiſes Apprehenſions of unfair Deſign. But when a Perſon, declaring himſelf to come from Heaven, renounces every Thing on Earth, which Men uſually hold dear; when he ſhews by plain Facts, that his Errand is, *not to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter, and to lay down his Life for his* Followers[b]; when he foreſees and foretells, that his Doctrine will bring him to the ſhamefulleſt and cruelleſt of Deaths, and yet goes on, and meets it calmly: here is the ſtrongeſt Evidence of Sincerity; and the moſt engaging Motive to love him, who hath ſo loved us, as to ſeal with his Blood the Truth of the good Tidings, which he came to bring us.

But there is yet one Reaſon more of our Saviour's Paſſion, of which if we ſee not diſtinctly the full Force, we ſee however, that it may be of infinite Force. Mankind are Sinners. Our firſt Parents were ſo: we

[a] Heb. ii. 18. [b] Matth. xx. 28.

have all been ſo, few of us think to what a Degree: and cloſe upon Sin follow Weakneſs and Guilt. The good Inſtructions and Example of our bleſſed Lord have indeed, without any Thing farther, a powerful Tendency to reform us, if we have Strength to reform ourſelves, on ſeeing that we ought. But what can they do for us, if we have not; which Experience too often proves to be our Caſe? Or ſuppoſing them to do it ever ſo effectually, ſtill it would be true, that we have been Sinners; have diſhonoured our Maker, and broken his Laws: and who but himſelf can tell, what Satisfaction the Holineſs of his Nature and the Honour of his Government may demand to be made for ſuch Offences? Mere Sorrow for having done amiſs very ſeldom frees us in this World from the ill Conſequences of Tranſgreſſion: and what Security can we have, that it will in the next? Living well for the future, is making no Amends for having ſinned before: for it is no more than our Duty, if we had never ſinned at all: beſides that what Men call living well, eſpecially Men deſtitute of the Spirit of Chriſt, is mixed with innumerable and grievous Faults. In this State of Things then, where is the Certainty, that our

Sins

Sins would or could be forgiven; or the Authority of God kept up in the Eyes of his Creation otherwiſe, than by puniſhing the guilty? And if that was to be done, the whole Race of Mankind muſt fall under the Sentence. Here it was therefore that his unſearchable Wiſdom interpoſed, who, alone knowing the fitteſt Means of reconciling Juſtice with Goodneſs, pitched upon this: that, as a terrifying Monument of the ill Deſert of Iniquity, his beloved Son ſhould in our Nature, and in our Stead, ſuffer Death; and for an eternal Demonſtration of the divine Benignity, his undergoing it voluntarily ſhould be rewarded with the higheſt Glory to himſelf; and with Pardon, and Grace, and Life eternal to all who made their humble Claim to them, by Repentance, Faith, and Love. Thus did God ſhew himſelf *juſt, and the Juſtifier of them which believe in Jeſus*[c]: thus did *Mercy and Truth meet together; Righteouſneſs and Peace kiſs each other*[d].

Aſſuredly ſo extraordinary a Method would never have been taken without extraordinary Need of it. That we ſhould fully diſcern the

[c] Rom. iii. 26. [d] Pſal. lxxxv. 10.

Need, is no Way neceſſary: it ſuffices that God did. Our Concern is no more than to accept Salvation, his own Gift, on his own Terms: renouncing all Merit in ourſelves, laying hold, by a lively Faith, on the Merits of our Redeemer's Obedience, thanking our heavenly Father from the Bottom of our Souls, for ſending his bleſſed Son into the World, and eſteeming moſt highly the Chriſtian Creed, the Chriſtian Worſhip, the Chriſtian Sacraments. *God forbid*, then, *that we ſhould glory* in any Thing, *ſave in the Croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*[e]: or ever be aſhamed of that, for all the Scorn and Ridicule of a thoughtleſs and profane World. But God forbid alſo, that while we profeſs to believe on him, we ſhould *crucify him to ourſelves afreſh, and put him* and his Religion *to Shame*[f], by tranſgreſſing and neglecting any Obligation of Piety towards our Maker, our Saviour, our Sanctifier; of Juſtice or Goodneſs towards our Fellow-Creatures; of Humility, Sobriety, Temperance, Chaſtity, in the Government of ourſelves. For in vain do we *call him Lord*, unleſs we *do the Things*[g] which he commands us; in vain do we

[e] Gal. vi. 14. [f] Heb. vi. 6. [g] Luke vi. 46.

truſt

truſt in his Sacrifice, unleſs we *preſent our* Souls and *Bodies, a Sacrifice acceptable unto God*[h]: in vain do we imagine our Peace is made through him in Heaven, unleſs on Earth we *follow Peace with all Men, and* that univerſal *Holineſs* of Life, *without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*[i].

[h] Rom. xii. 1. [i] Heb. xii. 14.

SERMON VIII.

1 Cor. xv. 19.

If in this Life only we have Hope in Chriſt, we are of all Men moſt miſerable.

IN the Words preceding theſe, the Apoſtle, after ſetting forth, in ſeveral Particulars, the Evidence of our bleſſed Lord's Reſurrection, goes on to prove from it the important Doctrine of a general Reſurrection to eternal Life.

It may ſeem to us now very ſtrange, that any, who called themſelves Chriſtians, could make the leaſt Doubt of ſo known and eſſential an Article of the Chriſtian Faith. But if we conſider the State, in which the World was then, we ſhall wonder no longer, that, of profeſſed Believers, there ſhould be ſome, who did not believe the dead would be raiſed again. Among the *Jews*, the Phariſees indeed were firmly perſuaded of this Truth. But the Sad-

ducees, a conſiderable Sect, though not for the Numbers, yet for the Rank of thoſe who embraced it, rejected the Doctrine of a future Life intirely: and looked on the Reſurrection, as a Thing peculiarly incredible. Notwithſtanding which, as they held a preſent Providence that rules the World, they might many of them, reading the Predictions of the Old Teſtament concerning the Meſſiah, ſeeing the Accompliſhment of them in the Perſon of *Jeſus*, and ſtruck with the Miracles, which he and his Followers performed, be perſuaded, on the Whole, that he was ſent from God; and yet be very backward to underſtand what he taught, when it contradicted their former Prejudices. But the Heathens were ſtill more likely to act thus. For amongſt them, even the ſteadieſt Believers of a future State all diſbelieved the riſing again of the Body, as a Thing both impoſſible and unfit: for their Men of Learning thought it only the Priſon of the Soul; which muſt always be an Impediment, inſtead of a Help to it. Suppoſe then Chriſtianity preached, with proper Evidence, to ſuch Perſons as theſe: they would receive very gladly what was ſaid of the Remiſſion of Sins, the Obligations to Virtue, the future Life

Life of the Soul, happy or miſerable, according to every one's Deeds. But when the Reſurrection of the Body was taught, there muſt evidently be great Danger, either that they would reject the Whole of the Goſpel, becauſe of this one ſeemingly incredible Part; as the Philoſophers at *Athens* did, who are mentioned in the *Acts*; or elſe, that they would ſo interpret this Part, as to reconcile it with their preconceived Opinion. Accordingly, the Hiſtory of the Church informs us, that ſeveral, in the firſt Ages, thought our Saviour died and roſe again, not in Reality but in miraculous Appearance only. And others had equally wild Fancies in other Articles of Religion: as indeed it was very natural for them to entertain ſurpriſing Imaginations, about Matters ſo intirely new to them: eſpecially when, in all Likelihood, great Numbers were converted to the Belief of Chriſtianity in general, by ſeeing or being informed of the Miracles wrought in its Favour; who perhaps had no Opportunity, for ſome Time, of hearing the particular Doctrines of it explained ſo diſtinctly, by thoſe who throughly underſtood them, as to be ſet right in every Point. And this may poſſibly have been one chief Reaſon of the

many

many ſtrange Notions, that we find ſome of the early Chriſtians embraced.

Beſides, they might the more eaſily be miſtaken, in the Caſe before us, on this Account: that the Apoſtles, imitating the Language, already in Uſe concerning the *Jewiſh* Proſelytes, expreſſed the Change, which Chriſtianity made in the Tempers and Condition of Men, by the Phraſes of *dying to Sin, being buried with Chriſt in Baptiſm, and riſing again to Newneſs of Life.* The ignorant or prejudiced might haſtily conclude from hence, that no other riſing again was intended to be taught: and that therefore *the Reſurrection was paſt already,* as we are told by our Apoſtle, ſome affirmed [a].

Now this Error, if it comprehended the Denial of a future State, ſubverted the main Purpoſe of Chriſtianity: which was, influencing the World to Piety and Virtue, from the Expectation of that State [b]. And where only the future Life of the Body was denied; even that, by Conſequence, made the Goſpel *of no*

[a] 2 Tim. ii. 18.

[b] Origen, Com. in Matth. xxii. 23. tom. 17. P. 811. inſiſts, that the Apoſtle writes here againſt Perſons diſbelieving a future Life; and that his Arguments are not concluſive againſt thoſe, who diſbelieve a Reſurrection only. I have endeavoured to ſhew the contrary in what follows.

Effect.

Effect. For if the Reſurrection of it was a Thing impoſſible, which all, who rejected it, ſeem to have held; then the Reſurrection of Chriſt was a Thing impoſſible. Yet this was the main Fact, to which the Apoſtles were appointed to bear Witneſs, and lay the Streſs of their Cauſe upon it. If therefore they erred here, they deſerved Belief in Nothing: their *Preaching was vain, and the Faith* of their Followers *vain alſo*[c]. Or, ſuppoſing Chriſtianity had ſtill ſufficient Evidence left; yet, in another Senſe, it would be *vain*, that is, ineffectual to the Forgiveneſs of our Sins; the very Foundation of which is, that *he, who was delivered for our Offences, roſe again for our Juſtification*[d]. If therefore he is not riſen, we are not juſtified: it appears not, that his Death was more than that of a common Man; he continues under the Power of it, not able to help himſelf, much leſs others; and human Kind remains, as it was before, liable to future Puniſhment, and uncertain of future Reward. This is the Apoſtle's Reaſoning, juſt before the Text: *If the dead riſe not, then is not Chriſt raiſed: and if Chriſt be not raiſed, your Faith is vain, ye are yet in your Sins*[e]. He goes on: *Then*

[c] 1 Cor. xvi. 14. [d] Rom. iv. 25. [e] 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17.

they

they alſo, which are fallen aſleep in Chriſt, are periſhed[f]. Neither dying in the Chriſtian Faith, nor dying for it, can do them Good with Reſpect to a future Life. And *if in this Life only we have Hope in Chriſt*, as very probably ſome of the Sadducee Converts might think, *we are of all Men moſt miſerable:* or, as the original Word ſtrictly ſignifies, *moſt pitiable.*

Now, of what Perſons this is ſaid, and on what Account it is true of them, a great Doubt hath been raiſed.

Some have gone ſo far, as to affirm, that, in the preſent World, Brutes are happier than Men, and bad Men than good. But of the former of theſe Points, at leaſt, plainly, the Apoſtle ſaith Nothing. Others underſtand him to mean, that the Condition of moral Heathens in this Life is better than that of Chriſtians, becauſe of the difficult Duties, and ſevere Reſtraints, which are peculiar to the latter. But evidently he doth not ſay at all, what the Condition of any Perſons actually is: but only what it would be, if they had not the Hope of hereafter to ſupport them. And therefore, with that Hope, good Men, and good Chriſtians, may, even at preſent, be happier than others: though it were true, that, without it, they would be more miſerable. Not

[f] Verſe 18.

that

that he meant to affirm, that they would be more miſerable, were the Proſpect of a better State out of the Queſtion. Far from it.

Read but the Deſcription, which he gives of the vicious Part of the Heathen World, in the Beginning of his Epiſtle to the *Romans*: where he tells us, *God had given them over to a reprobate Mind, to do thoſe Things, which are not convenient; being filled with all Unrighteouſneſs, Fornication, Wickedneſs, Covetouſneſs, Maliciouſneſs, Envy, Murder, Strife, Deceit, Malignity; without Underſtanding, without natural Affection, implacable, unmerciful*[g]. Could he poſſibly think this a happy State? He appeals to their own Experience for the contrary: *What Fruit had ye then in thoſe Things, whereof ye are now aſhamed*[h]? Heathen Vices then he did not think at all conducive to the Enjoyment of Life: nor doth he ever intimate, that Heathen Virtues were more ſo, than Chriſtian Graces. So far as they are both the ſame, they muſt have the ſame Effects: and there are few Caſes, if any, in which the Goſpel, rightly underſtood, is more ſtrict than Reaſon, duly cultivated: beſides that thoſe Precepts of it, which are the ſtricteſt of all, perhaps contribute the moſt of all to our Hap-

[g] Rom. i. 28—31. [h] Rom. vi. 21.

pineſs here; by ſtriking at the Root, from whence our Faults and Uneaſineſſes ſpring, and requiring of us that inward Self-government, which is the only Means of true Self-enjoyment. There is alſo another exceeding great Advantage of Chriſtian Virtue; that the Goſpel affords ſuch peculiar Evidences and Means of God's Grace and Aſſiſtance, in Proportion as we need it, to do every Thing, to which he calls us; that though we were not to add the Conſideration of his rewarding us hereafter, yet Believers would undoubtedly be capable of going through the ſame Difficulties with much greater Spirit, Comfort, and Succeſs, than other Men. And accordingly our Saviour aſſures us, that *his Yoke is eaſy, and his Burthen light* [i]. And St. *Paul* yet more diſtinctly aſſerts, that *Godlineſs*, meaning certainly Chriſtian Godlineſs, *is profitable unto all Things, having Promiſe of the Life that now is*, as well as *that which is to come* [k].

But of whom can it be then, that he ſpeaks, when he ſaith ſo expreſsly, *If in this Life only we have Hope in Chriſt, we are of all Men moſt miſerable?* I anſwer, of the very ſame, whom he denoted, by the Word *We*, the laſt Time he uſed it, but a few Lines before: of the Witneſſes of

[i] Matth. xi. 30. [k] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Chriſt's

Christ's Resurrection, and the Preachers of his Gospel; who then suffered many Afflictions on Account of it in this Life; and were wretched indeed, if they had no Prospect of being the better for it in another: as were certainly in Proportion also their first Followers. For in that Age, *all that lived godly in Christ Jesus suffered Persecution* [l]; and *knew*, as the Apostle elsewhere reminds them, that *they were appointed thereunto* [m].

Not those Duties therefore, which always belonged to the Christian Profession, but those Sufferings, which then attended it, were the Reason, that, had not the Hopes of a better Life through Christ supported them, they had been *the most miserable of all Men*. And this appears more plainly yet from the Sequel of the Discourse; where, resuming this Part of the Subject again, he doth not argue, *If the dead rise not*, why do we live soberly and righteously; as he doubtless ought to have done, if Sobriety and Righteousness were prejudicial in this World; but, *If the dead rise not, why stand we in Jeopardy every Hour* [n]? *What advantageth it me, that I have fought with Beasts at Ephesus, if the dead rise not* [o]?

[l] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [m] 1 Thess. iii. 3. [n] 1 Cor. xv. 30. [o] Verse 32.

He doth indeed, after this, immediately subjoin, *Let us eat and drink; for To-morrow we die.* But these Words, in the Passage of *Isaiah* [p], from whence they are taken, stand in Opposition, not to Temperance, but to Mortification and Fasting. And here they do not mean, let us indulge Debauchery and Excess: but, let us not deprive ourselves, if we can hope for no future Advantage from it, of the innocent Satisfactions and Comforts of Life, while it lasts. The Expression may indeed sometimes be used in a bad Sense: but it is most frequently used in a good one; as, to mention no more, where our Saviour saith of himself, that *he came eating and drinking* [q]; and where St. *Paul* pleads, *Have we not Power to eat and to drink* [r]? His Intention therefore was only to say: If there be no Resurrection, if Christ be not risen, if his Religion can be of no Service to us hereafter, let us not make ourselves miserable for the Sake of it here: let us not spend our Lives, as he elsewhere declares he did his, for the Service of the Gospel, *in Wearineſs and Painfulneſs, in Hunger and Thirſt, in Cold and Nakedneſs* [s]; but renouncing what only brings on us fruitless Sufferings,

[p] Is. xxii. 13. [q] Matth. xi. 19. [r] 1 Cor. ix. 4. [s] 2 Cor. xi. 27.

enjoy

enjoy our Eaſe like other wiſe Men. Theſe Conſequences he knew would ſtartle thoſe, whom he preſſed with them; and ſhew them the Neceſſity, either of abandoning their Faith entirely, which he was certain they would not, or of admitting the Reſurrection for one Article of it.

Upon the Whole then it appears, that the Perſecutions, not the Duties of Chriſtianity, were what would have made the Believers in it miſerable, had the Hope, which it gave them, been confined to this Life. And indeed, though poſſibly God might have appointed, that doing our Duty ſhould be attended of Neceſſity with greater Uneaſineſs and leſs Pleaſure here, than tranſgreſſing it: yet ſuch a Conſtitution of Things would have made his moral Perfections, and his Providence, much more doubtful; for preſent Appearances would then have been altogether againſt them: and this would greatly have diſcouraged the Practice of Virtue; amongſt all Men indeed, but eſpecially in thoſe many Ages and Countries, which had no clear Knowledge, whatever Glimmerings they might have, of a future State.

It is true, ſome excellent Perſons have imagined, that the fewer Advantages they allowed

to Virtue here in their pious Diſcourſes and Writings, the more fully they ſhould prove it muſt be rewarded hereafter: and therefore have ſtrenuouſly pleaded for the preſent Happineſs of Vice. But we ought not to ſtate Things otherwiſe than they are, in order to draw uſeful Concluſions: and no Good will come of it. Being perſuaded, that Wickedneſs is happier at preſent, may incline as many to think God is not diſpleaſed with it; as any Reaſonings from his Attributes will incline to think he is. For, if the State of Things be contrived by his Providence to favour bad Men more than good now; this may well raiſe a Doubt, whether the ſame Providence will ſo certainly do juſt the contrary in the next World. And a very ſmall Hope of eſcaping Puniſhment there, will effectually determine Men to live as they ought not, if it be acknowledged their Intereſt here. Or ſuppoſing it ever ſo plain, that if Virtue, on the Whole, ſuffer in this Life, it muſt be rewarded in another; yet what we call Virtue in ourſelves will be far from intitling us to ſuch Reward. And ſuppoſing any Creature faultleſsly obedient, the Juſtice of God will be bound to beſtow on it no greater and no longer Reward, than will barely make Amends for its Sufferings. And if we argue

from his Goodneſs; his doing ever ſo much for it on Earth, will be no Manner of Objection againſt his doing ſtill more in Heaven. For that will be only carrying on a Scheme, which he hath already begun, and therefore, we may juſtly preſume, he will compleat. If a moral and religious Behaviour be, according to the natural Courſe of Things in this World, beneficial to Men, and a wicked and impious one hurtful; as I hope you have often heard them proved to be: then we have clear Evidence of Fact, that God, who hath made them ſo, doth actually reward the one and puniſh the other. And though at preſent his Recompences are neither exactly proportioned, nor without Exception conſtant: yet, as we ſee many Reaſons, that may juſtly occaſion this, and cannot but acknowledge there may be many more; there ariſes, from the Whole, great Foundation for Hope, that the plain Diſtinction, which he hath made already, will be yet more perfectly made in a proper Time. So that there is no Need for us to apprehend we muſt neceſſarily be miſerable here, in order to be happy hereafter; or to lie under the Imputation of depreciating Virtue, and making it good for Nothing to its Votaries, in this World, in Order to ſecure it a

Retribution in the next. Reaſon doth not direct to that Method: Revelation hath not taken it: and the Teachers and Profeſſors of Chriſtianity ſhould avoid expoſing themſelves to a Charge, from which Chriſtianity itſelf is perfectly free.

But ſtill, were we to ſpeak of Virtue, as always its own Reward here, and attaining its End ſufficiently in the Compaſs of this narrow Life; that would be an Extreme on the other Hand, and a very pernicious one; whatever great Names have countenanced it, ſome with good Deſigns, and ſome with bad. Such extravagant Praiſes of moral Beauty and Excellency will ſeldom have any other Effect, where they have moſt, than raiſing an Enthuſiaſm for it, that will be little more than notional, or an Affectation of it, that will be Nothing more than Talk. And with the cooler Part of Mankind, attempting to perſuade them of the contrary to what, in many Caſes, they ſee and feel, is loſing all Credit; and making every Thing that is ſaid to the Advantage of right Conduct ſuſpicious, by inſiſting on more, than can poſſibly be true.

The real State of the Caſe is plainly this. A Temper and Behaviour of Piety, Juſtice, Benevolence, and rational Self-government, is

fitted

fitted in its Nature to make our Lives here as happy, as we can make them. And therefore, though we had no farther Proſpect, our preſent Intereſt would, generally ſpeaking, conſiſt in theſe Things: and would always conſiſt in them, if no particular Circumſtances happened, to make Exceptions. But the Misfortune is, that ſuch Circumſtances do frequently happen. Some Men have, from their very Conſtitution, peculiarly ſtrong Propenſities to Sin, which give them long and painful Exerciſe; and, after all, can barely be kept under, not rooted out, let them do what they will. Is this a State of Enjoyment, and its own Reward? Or a State of Warfare, that requires a future Recompence, proportionable to the Sufferings of it, to make it eligible? But others are yet more unhappy. They have added evil Habits to evil Inclinations: and, if they will amend their Ways, muſt feel deep Remorſe for what they have done amiſs already; and go through infinite Difficulties to do right for the Time to come, in Contradiction to all their bad Cuſtoms, their inflamed Paſſions, their vicious Friends; muſt bear great Reproach, perhaps undergo much Loſs, in making Reparation for the Injuries they have committed; when the Whole of this might poſſibly have been avoided,

by

by perſiſting in their former Courſe. And, it may be, after all, they have a Proſpect at moſt, barely of living long enough to accompliſh the Change, but not to enjoy it. Who is there now, that can well be more *miſerable*, than ſuch a Man's Reſolution of Amendment makes him, *if in this Life only he hath Hope?* Here then is a plain Caſe, in which the Belief of a future State is able to defend the Cauſe of Virtue, and every Thing elſe unable. But that, already mentioned, of Perſecution, is a plainer ſtill. When Men are to ſuffer Shame and Infamy, Penalties and Impriſonments, Pains and Tortures, for the Sake of true Religion, as Multitudes have done; or of moral Honeſty, as has been the Caſe of too many: what is there in the fulleſt Conſciouſneſs of doing their Duty, ſufficient to compenſate for theſe Things, to Souls of any common Make, if ſuch Conſciouſneſs alone be all the Comfort they are to have, and even that very ſoon, perhaps inſtantly, to die with them? Undoubtedly the Senſe of acting as we ought is a powerful Support. But, in Caſes of Extremity, it is mocking the Miſeries of the good, to propoſe that ſingle Remedy, as enough for them. And though it may happen but ſeldom, that they *ſuffer* a great deal *for Righteouſneſs Sake*;

Sake[t]; yet they very often ſuffer more or leſs for it. And whoever doth not ſee, how happy it is in every Inſtance of this Sort, and how neceſſary in moſt, that the Encouragements of Futurity ſhould come in to the Aſſiſtance of the preſent Motives to do well; hath either very little Attention to the Weakneſs of human Minds; or very little Concern to have Virtue practiſed, how vehemently ſoever he may plead for its being applauded.

I will not enlarge on a farther Conſideration, though an exceedingly material one, that the Sufferings, which Mankind in general have to go through, are ſo frequent and ſo heavy, that there is much Need of a better Proſpect to alleviate them; and though the pious and virtuous were never to be the *moſt miſerable of all Men*, yet *all Men*, in one Part or another of their Days, would be *miſerable* more than enough, *if they had Hope in this Life only*.

The Expectation of future Bleſſedneſs therefore, even when it was more doubtful, was *a Light ſhining in a dark Place*[u], to cheer the fainting Hearts, and direct the wandering Steps of the Children of Men. Yet ſtill to have

[t] 1 Pet. iii. 14. [u] 2 Pet. i. 19.

Happineſs

Happiness in their View, with such Uncertainty, as former Ages were in, whether it could be attained or not, must unquestionably mix great Anxiety with their Expectations; and leave their Circumstances, on the Whole, very pitiable. But God, in his Mercy, hath removed all Doubts from us; not only by express Promises, but an experimental Proof also, of a Resurrection to Life everlasting, in the Person of our blessed Lord: that through him we *might have the strongest Consolation, when we fly for Refuge to lay hold on the Hope set before us: which Hope we have as an Anchor of the Soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth within the Veil; whither also the Fore-runner is already entered for us, even Jesus* [w].

You cannot but see then, of what great Consequence it is for all wise Men to encourage this Faith, and all good Men to have frequent Recourse to it. For the principal Reason, why we are, most of us, so faulty and so wretched in this Life is, that we attend so little to the Rewards of another. We ourselves perhaps do not suspect, how little it is. Would God that every one who hears me, would make a diligent Examination, what Share of his Desires, his Hopes,

[w] Heb. vi. 18—20.

and

and his Fears, the unſeen World takes up; and ſeriouſly aſk himſelf, whether it can poſſibly be fit, that the infinitely moſt important Part of his Condition ſhould be allowed ſo very much the leaſt Part in his Thoughts.

But then to think of our Condition to good Effect; we muſt be ſure, not to ſet our Minds more on the Privileges, than the Duties of it; but remember, that as the virtuous would ſometimes be the moſt miſerable of Men, if there were no Expectation of Futurity; ſo the vicious muſt be always the moſt miſerable, if there be any. Every Promiſe of the Goſpel is a Threatening to them; and the Doctrine of Salvation will only condemn them to ſeverer Puniſhments. Let *every Man therefore, who hath Hope in Chriſt, purify himſelf, even as he is pure*[x]. And let every Man, who deſires to do ſo, remember, that he can do it only, by a ſtedfaſt Belief, that Chriſt died and roſe again on our Account; *for this is the Victory that overcometh the World, even our Faith*[y]: by an humble Dependance on Grace from above, to be obtained by our Prayers; *for we are not ſufficient of ourſelves to do any Thing*[z]: and by

[x] 1 John iii. 3. [y] 1 John v. 4. [z] 2 Cor. iii. 15.

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a diligent and conſtant Uſe of that Grace, in labouring to perform every Part of our Duty; for we are to *work out our own Salvation, becauſe God worketh in us, both to will and to do*[a].

[a] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

SER-

SERMON IX.

MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you: All Manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto Men: but the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto Men.

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a Word againſt the Son of Man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.

THESE Words of our bleſſed Lord ſeldom, if ever, fail to excite a peculiar Attention and Alarm in the Minds of all, who read or hear them: and the Doctrine, which they contain, appears to ſome, either ſo difficult to be underſtood, or ſo improper to be admitted; and fills others with ſuch Terrors, or ſinks them

them into such Despondency; that, for the Sake of great Numbers, it should be well explained from Time to Time. And Men ought to have the Nature of this Crime laid before them, when they are not disturbed within by the Imagination of having committed it. For when they are, the Agitation of their Minds too commonly disqualifies them from judging rightly concerning either the Sense of the Text, or even their own Actions.

Now there are several Sins against the Holy Ghost, mentioned in Scripture; *Lying to* [a], *resisting* [b], *tempting* [c], *grieving*, [d], *quenching*, *the Spirit* [e]: yet none of these is ever said to be unpardonable; and therefore, we may be sure, none of them is so: because, if it had, undoubtedly the Word of God would have given us that Warning in Relation to it: whereas on the contrary, the Text itself, in the plainest Words, assures us, that every Sin is pardonable, excepting one, which is different from all these. If then either the wicked, reflecting on their Guilt, or the innocent, overcome with groundless Fears, are apprehensive, that they have committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost, as

[a] Acts v. 3. [b] Acts vii. 51. [c] Acts v. 9.
[d] Eph. iv. 30. [e] 1 Thess. v. 19.

they

they uſually call it, and therefore cannot be forgiven: they ſhould, in the firſt Place, be aſked, or aſk themſelves, and anſwer diſtinctly, what Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt they have committed? What the particular Thing is, that weighs ſo heavy upon them? For unleſs it be preciſely *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, there is no Pretence for ſaying, they cannot be forgiven. There are but three Paſſages in the Bible, that mention this Matter: the Text: Mark iii. 28, 29. and Luke xii. 10: in every one of which, the very ſame Word, *Blaſphemy*, is uſed; and no other. So that, of whatever Sin elſe againſt the divine Spirit they may have been guilty, if they have not been guilty of that, they may undoubtedly be forgiven. And this ſingle Obſervation, duly attended to, is ſufficient to preſerve, or even reſtore, the Quiet of Multitudes. But ſtill too many, for Want of underſtanding the Nature of the Blaſphemy which our bleſſed Lord here means, may falſely conceive themſelves to be chargeable with it: whilſt others, of a different Turn, may wonder, or be much offended, at finding ſo terrible a Denunciation againſt it: and a third Sort, if they perceive no Danger of actually incurring this Condemnation, may by no Means conſider, ſo ſeriouſly as they

ought, how near it they may come. I ſhall therefore endeavour to ſhew,

I. What the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

II. What is intended by his Declaration, that *it ſhall not be forgiven, neither in this World, nor that to come.*

III. Why he paſſes ſo heavy a Sentence on this one Sin.

IV. What Things do, or do not, approach towards it.

I. What the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

Now the Term *Blaſphemy*, in the original Language of the New Teſtament, whence we have derived it into our own, ſignifies Nothing elſe, than ſpeaking evil of any one unjuſtly. And it is frequently uſed to denote ſpeaking evil of our Equals; but more peculiarly, of our Superiors; and therefore, moſt eminently, of God the Father Almighty, his Son and Spirit: to which three alone this Expreſſion is confined in our vulgar Tongue. Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt therefore is ſpeaking irreverently and injuriouſly of the Holy Ghoſt: which may be done, by vilifying either his Perſon, or his Works. But of the former our Saviour doth not ſpeak: for

Nothing

Nothing had happened, which could lead him to it. The *Jews*, whom he was reproving, profeſſed, and had, the higheſt Veneration for the Spirit of God: therefore they had certainly uttered no perſonal Reproaches againſt him: indeed it doth not appear, that they had named him in what gave Riſe to the Declaration, made in the Text. But the Caſe, to lay it before you in the Words of the Goſpel, was this: *There was brought to him one poſſeſſed with a Devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him: and all the People were amazed, and ſaid, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Phariſees heard it, they ſaid, This Fellow doth not caſt out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.* It follows, *And Jeſus knew their Thoughts*[f]. Upon which he argued with them, that deſtroying the Works of the Devil, his Influence over the Bodies and Souls of Men, could not proceed from the Devil himſelf, for that would be overturning his own Kingdom; but evidently ſhewed a Power oppoſite and ſuperior to his: and then he ſubjoined the Words now under Conſideration; which many learned Interpreters have underſtood thus: that ſuch, as were ignorantly led by common Prejudice to ſpeak againſt

[f] Matth. xii. 22—25.

Christ, appearing only as a Son of Man; and, taking him for a mere Man, reproached him with being *the Carpenter's Son*[g], or even *glutonous and a Wine-bibber, and a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*[h]; might, notwithstanding, come to see their Mistake, and be forgiven: but when he performed Miracles, before their Eyes, to rectify their Opinion, as he had just done then; if they reviled these also, ascribing them to the Agency of the Devil, contrary to all Reason, and perhaps to their own Consciences too; (for thus some understand the Observation, that *Jesus knew their Thoughts*;) this was *adding Sin to Sin*[i]; was in Effect imputing Wickedness to the Holy Spirit of God, by representing what was plainly done by him, as done by an evil Being; and should not be pardoned. Nor can it be denied, but this Interpretation seems to be much confirmed by St. *Mark*; who observes, that our Saviour gave them this Warning, *because they said, he had an unclean Spirit*[k].

But still other eminent Men, though they allow, that he *cast out Devils*, as himself expressly affirms[l], and performed the rest of his wonderful Works, *by the Spirit of God*, which

[g] Matth. xiii. 55. [h] Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.
[i] Is. xxx. i. [k] Mark iii. 30. [l] Matth. xii. 28.

is

is the same with the Holy Ghost; yet remark very truly, that this Phrase, *the Holy Ghost*, these Words thus joined, in the Gospels and Acts never signify the Power of working Miracles, but often signify the spiritual Gifts, of speaking with Tongues and the like, which the Apostles received: and that accordingly, though they had long before done many Miracles, as well as their Master, we are told notwithstanding in the New Testament, that *the Holy Ghost was not yet given* [m]; but promised, after our blessed Lord's Ascension. From hence then they argue, that conformably to this Manner of speaking, *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* must mean vilifying, not the miraculous Operations, of which the Spirit was the Author then; but the farther Manifestations of himself, which were soon to follow them; and our Saviour must design in the Text to inform his Opposers, that all they had said, and all they should say, of him, while he remained on Earth, as a *Deceiver of the People* [n] and even one that *had a Devil* [o], might be forgiven them: but if, when he was gone to the Father; and the *Comforter*, or Advocate, for so it should be translated, *come* [p], by

[m] John vii. 39. [n] John vii. 12. [o] Matth. xi. 18. Luke vii. 33. [p] John xv. 26.

ſupernatural Gifts to *convince the World of Sin, becauſe they had not believed on him*[q]; if they ſhould go on then to ſpeak evil of theſe alſo, their Guilt ſhould never be remitted. And, in Confirmation of this Expoſition, they obſerve further, that Chriſt, at his Death, prayed the *Father to forgive*[r] his Crucifiers, though at the ſame Time they reviled and derided both him and his Miracles; *he ſaved others, himſelf he cannot ſave; let Chriſt the King of Iſrael deſcend now from the Croſs, and we will believe him*[s]: and that, ſuitably to his Maſter's Example, St. *Peter* intreated them afterwards to *repent and be converted, that their Sins might be blotted out*[t], which therefore was yet poſſible: but when, they ſtill reſiſted the Holy Ghoſt, after theſe fuller Proofs of his Interpoſition, *contradicting and blaſpheming*; then the Apoſtles *turned* from them, as *unworthy of everlaſting Life*, and went *to the Gentiles*[u].

This latter Interpretation, I confeſs, appears to me the more probable. But, in this they agree: that the Blaſphemy, which is pronounced unpardonable, was not ſpeaking evil

[q] John xvi. 8, 9. [r] Luke xxiii. 34. [s] Matth. xxvii 42. Mark xv. 32. [t] Acts iii. 19. [u] Acts xiii, 45, 46.

of

of the Perſon of the Holy Ghoſt, but of the miraculous Powers which he exerted: and the Difference is only, what miraculous Powers are meant; whether thoſe mighty Works, which our Saviour performed by Means of the divine Spirit, while on Earth; or thoſe Gifts, which were poured forth on Men, after he aſcended to Heaven: a Queſtion, eaſy, no Doubt, to be anſwered then; but of no Importance to us now.

What we are concerned to remark farther is, that our bleſſed Lord's Denunciation was pointed, not againſt ſuch Blaſphemy or Evil-ſpeaking, as mere Miſtake or Inconſiderateneſs might lead Men into; but ſuch, as proceeded from wilful and deliberate Wickedneſs: for with this he charges the *Jews*, immediately after the Text: *O Generation of Vipers, how can ye, being evil, ſpeak good Things? For out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth ſpeaketh* [w]. Nor doth he paſs ſo dreadful a Sentence on the Uſe of opprobrious Language, concerning Operations of the Spirit, manifeſted in diſtant Places or Times; but concerning Miracles performed, or ſupernatural Gifts exerciſed, before Mens own Eyes; for that Advantage they, to whom he ſpoke, enjoyed. Nor did even they fall

[w] Matth. xii. 34.

under this Condemnation for every hasty Expression of Contempt; but for such, as they continued to utter, after a sufficient Time allowed them to grow cool and serious, and reflect. For when, upon the Apostles receiving the Gift of Tongues, there were some, that *mocking said, These Men are full of new Wine* [x]; though it was certainly a blaspheming Saying in itself, and came from a wrong Disposition of Mind, and reflected on a Work of the Holy Ghost done in their own Presence; yet being only a sudden Flight, St. *Peter* did not impute it as Blasphemy to them, but merely as Rashness of Judgment; and therefore applied himself to convince them of their Mistake, with so good Effect, that 3000 were converted that very Day. On the Whole therefore, the only Persons, whom we have Ground to think guilty of *the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, meant in the Text, are they, who from bad Motives, and, as we say, in cold Blood, revile and rail against such Operations of the divine Spirit, as are performed in their own Presence. Let us now inquire,

II. What is the true Sense of our Saviour's Declaration, that this one Sin *shall not*

[x] Acts ii. 13.

be

be forgiven, neither in this preſent World, nor that to come.

Some have apprehended him to mean only, that all paſſionate and injurious Language on common Occaſions ſhall be conſidered as mere human Infirmity, that doth not put Men out of a State of Salvation; whereas the like Language concerning the Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt doth: brings them into a Condition of ſpiritual Death here, which, unleſs they riſe again from it by a particular Repentance, will be followed by eternal Death hereafter. But ſurely it is taking much too great Liberty; firſt, by *all Manner of Sin and Blaſphemy* to underſtand only all ſinful Evil-ſpeaking about common Matters, though our Saviour hath ſpecified ſpeaking againſt himſelf: then to ſay, that all Evil-ſpeaking about common Matters is conſiſtent with Salvation; and laſtly, when the Text affirms peremptorily, that *the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, and that alone, *ſhall not be forgiven*; to add, unleſs Men particularly repent of it: a Limitation, for which there is not the leaſt Authority, and which would bring down this Sin to juſt the ſame Level with many more. Some again think the Words of our bleſſed Lord, though expreſſed abſo-

abſolutely, are meant only in Compariſon; that all other Sins will be forgiven ſooner; and this with the moſt Difficulty of any. But, though doubtleſs there are ſome Inſtances, eſpecially in the Old Teſtament, where what is ſaid poſitively, muſt be underſtood comparatively: yet, I think none will be found of that Sort, where the Aſſertion is made with ſuch great and calm Solemnity, and ſo circumſtantially. Laſtly, not a few, obſerving that in all Writers, the moſt general Denunciations often admit no ſmall Number of particular Exceptions, conceive, that this before us may[y]. But then ſome Foundation muſt always appear for ſuch Exceptions, either in other Paſſages of the ſame or other Writers, concerning the ſame Matter, or in the Nature of the Thing: and no ſuch Foundation hath yet been ſhewn in the preſent Caſe. Beſides, the Declaration, that *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven*, is itſelf an Exception from a general Rule, that *all Manner of Sin ſhall be forgiven*: and to ſuppoſe other Exceptions again from this Excep-

[y] *Eraſmus* in his Paraphraſe interprets it, *vix inveniet veniam*. And *Latimer* in *Strype*'s Memorials, vol. 2. p. 70. ſaith, This Sin is called unforgiveable, becauſe ſeldom forgiven: but on Repentance it may.

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tion, ſeems very unnatural. It would indeed be preſumptuous to reſtrain the Mercies of God: but it is equally and perhaps more dangerous to extend them farther, than he permits us.

The Addition, that this Sin *ſhall neither be forgiven in this World, nor the World to come,* is taken by many for no more, than a ſtronger and fuller Way of ſaying, that it *ſhall not*, or ſhall *never, be forgiven:* which are the Expreſſions uſed in St. *Mark* and St. *Luke*. Some underſtand by it, neither in the Age or Diſpenſation of the Law, which was then preſent, when our Saviour ſpoke; nor of the Goſpel, which was ready to take Place of it: for ſo the Phraſes, *this World* and *the World to come,* are uſed in ſome Paſſages of the New Teſtament. But others, with good Appearance of Truth, carry the Meaning further, and apprehend it to be; that, whereas Corrections, and ſevere ones, are inflicted on many Sins in this Life, which yet, through the Grace and Mercy of God, are not imputed, to Mens Condemnation, at the laſt Day: for this Sin, on the contrary, both heavy Puniſhment ſhould fall on the guilty here, and heavier yet hereafter. And accordingly, in Fact, theſe blaſphemous *Jews* underwent, in a few Years, the moſt dreadful temporal Judgements: nor

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have we Cauſe to think of their eternal State otherwiſe, than with great Horror. Such then being the Senſe of our Saviour's Words, let us enquire,

III. Why he paſſed a Sentence, thus peculiarly ſevere, againſt this one only Sin.

Now, had the Offence been ſpeaking irreverently concerning the Perſon of the Holy Ghoſt: it would not have been eaſy to aſſign any Reaſon, why that ſhould be leſs pardonable, than the ſame Irreverence towards the Father, or the Son. But ſince, as you have ſeen, it was vilifying his miraculous Operations and Gifts: there appear in it the moſt evident Marks of ſuch Guilt and Danger, as could belong to no other. It was the greateſt and wilfulleſt Obſtinacy in the wrong, that can be imagined; when they, and all around them, ſaw the moſt illuſtrious and beneficial Miracles, done in Confirmation of the moſt holy and benevolent Doctrine, to ſtand out in Oppoſition to both: to inſiſt, that the Devil conſpired againſt himſelf, rather than own the Finger of God, where it was ſo exceedingly viſible: and not only to blaſpheme the Son of Man thus, during his State of Humiliation, at which indeed their Prejudices might naturally take ſome conſiderable Offence; but

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after he was *exalted by the right Hand of God*[z], and had *baptized* his Apoſtles *with the Holy Ghoſt and with Fire*, as *John* had foretold he ſhould[a]; and enabled them by that Means, both to do *greater Works than himſelf*[b], and beſides to *underſtand all Myſteries*[c], to *diſcern* and *make manifeſt the Secrets of Hearts*[d], to *ſpeak with unknown Tongues*[e], to *ſhew* beforehand *Things to come*[f], to confer the ſame Gifts on whom they would; and when every Aſſembly of Chriſtians afforded almoſt daily Proofs of theſe Things; to perſiſt yet, neither *entering into the Kingdom of Heaven themſelves, nor ſuffering others to enter in*[g]; and not only to oppoſe, but to revile, the ſtrongeſt Evidence, laid before them in the fulleſt Manner; and that, very probably, againſt the ſecret Conviction of their own Hearts too: ſuch Behaviour manifeſts the moſt hardened and deſperate Wickedneſs. All Men muſt ſuppoſe it, and our Saviour knew it, to proceed from an incurable Diſeaſe within; prevailing over the powerfulleſt and laſt Remedy, which divine Wiſdom thought fit to uſe: and therefore his Declaration, however awful, was but the natu-

[z] Acts ii. 33. [a] Matth. iii. 11. [b] John xiv. 12.
[c] 1 Cor. xiii. 2. [d] 1 Cor. xii. 10. xiv. 25. [e] 1 Cor. xiv. 2, &c.
[f] John xvi. 13. [g] Matth. xxiii. 13.

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ral Conſequence of the State they were in. Had they only doubted, had they only denied, there might have been ſome Hope of them: but when Men are come to railing and blaſpheming, as they were, they have done with attending and conſidering. Yet ſtill, had they only rejected the Teſtimony of others concerning the wonderful Operations and Gifts of the Spirit; ſtronger Teſtimony of others, or that of their own Senſes, might have been added: but when this laſt had been vouchſafed them, there could poſſibly be no higher. It might indeed appear to them, on maturer Reflection, more convincing, than at firſt: but after ſufficient Leiſure to reflect had been alſo allowed them, as I have ſhewn you it was; every Thing, that could be done for them, conſiſtently with leaving them Freedom of Will, had been done, and all in vain.

This, you ſee, is plainly a very different Caſe from that of any other Sin. And the peculiar Guilt and Danger of it conſiſts, not in its being committed againſt the Holy Spirit; but in its being a wilful and obſtinate Rejection, from wicked Motives, of the only Means remaining for Reformation and Forgiveneſs. Suppoſe the Providence of God had ſo ordered it, that all Diſeaſes

Diſeaſes ſhould be curable, by ſome one particular Courſe of Medicine: ſtill whoever deſpiſed and ridiculed that Courſe, inſtead of taking it, muſt periſh. And in like Manner, though all Sins would elſe be pardonable through the Grace of the Goſpel: whoever ſcorns the utmoſt Efforts of that Grace, muſt fail of it. And our Saviour foreſeeing, that theſe Perſons would, pronounces their Doom. Every Advantage, that any others ever were to enjoy, they had enjoyed to the full, without Effect: and it was not ſuitable to the Honour of God's Government, or the Holineſs of his Nature, to ſtrive with ſuch by ſtill more extraordinary Methods; and do for the worſt of Men, what he had not done for the reſt. Their Condition, therefore, was not, that they ſhould be denied Pardon, though they did repent: but it was foreknown, that they would not repent. So that whoever doth, may be ſure, for that very Reaſon, that he hath not been guilty of the unpardonable *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. Indeed no one now, when, through Length of Time, the Circumſtances of the Caſe are ſo much altered, can lie under the ſame Guilt with thoſe, to whom our Saviour ſpoke: nor can he therefore be under the ſame Condemnation: for *the Judgement*

of God is always *according to Truth* [h]. But though we cannot equal the Wickedneſs of the *Jews* in this Reſpect, yet we may come dreadfully near it. And therefore I proceed now to ſhew you,

IV. What Sins do, or do not, approach towards that, which is mentioned in the Text.

And here I ſhall ſpeak ſeparately, firſt of the Caſe of Unbelievers in Chriſt, then of Believers in him.

Unbelievers, ignorant of the Goſpel, or of its proper Evidence, and who could not help their Ignorance, are not blameable for their Unbelief: nor ſurely inexcuſeable, though they ſhould add reproachful Words to it, *ſpeaking evil of Things which they know not* [i]. And though it be a great Unhappineſs to them, that they have neither the ſame Means of Reformation and ſpiritual Improvement, nor the ſame Aſſurance of Pardon and Acceptance, that Chriſtians have: yet it is their Unhappineſs only, not their Fault. But ſuch Unbelievers, as through a contemptuous Negligence refuſe to conſider the Doctrine of Chriſt, or from a vain Opinion of the Sufficiency of their own Reaſon, or from Love to

[h] Rom. ii. 2. [i] Jude 10.

any

any Sin, reject it; these put themselves in the high Road towards the Sin, condemned here by our Saviour. And if they add to their Infidelity profane and irreverent Language; they advance nearer to it. But if Part of that Language be ascribing the Miracles and spiritual Gifts, mentioned in the New Testament, to an evil Power, of which some amongst them have given Intimations; and above all, if they do this from a malicious Heart, and perhaps against their own inward Persuasion too; then they come as near to it, as they are able. And yet one cannot but hope, that since the Evidence of the Gospel is not either quite so full and strong, or so obvious and easily seen at once, as it was in the Days of our Saviour and his Apostles; they may, after all, think better of it, repent and obtain Pardon.

If indeed they have, since they came to a full Use of Reason, deliberately professed Christianity, and then forsaken it, and become Railers and Scoffers at it; this Case is worse, than if they had never believed; in Proportion as they have seen the Evidences, understood the Nature, and felt the Influences of the Gospel; and yet, after all, have broken the Faith, which they had so-

lemnly engaged to it. The Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* therefore declares *it is impoſſible for thoſe, who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance: ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open Shame*[k]. But then, explicit and terrible as theſe Words are, yet ſome of them plainly relate to thoſe miraculous Gifts and Powers, which we do not now experience, and therefore cannot ſin againſt them to that Degree, nor by Conſequence make our Condition ſo deſperate, as thoſe who did: beſides that *impoſſible*, both in Scripture and common Language, often means no more, than extremely difficult and hopeleſs; but not beyond the Reach of his Grace, *with whom all Things are poſſible*[l]. And as this Impoſſibility is expreſsly here ſaid to be that of *renewing them to Repentance:* (which powerfully ſtrengthens what I have already proved to you, that the *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is unpardonable, only becauſe it leaves no Foundation to

[k] Heb. vi. 4—6. [l] Matth. xix. 26.

repent

repent upon) ſo when any one is *renewed to Repentance*, this Paſſage contains not the leaſt Intimation, that he cannot be forgiven.

But ſuppoſing a total and ſettled Unbelief and Apoſtacy to be ever ſo irretrievable; yet merely having doubted, nay, having inclined to the wrong Side, or even been a good deal perſuaded of it, and that for ſome Time, is very far from being the ſame Caſe. The Apoſtles themſelves at firſt did not believe the Reſurrection of our Saviour: St. *Thomas* ſtood out a whole Week: two of them in St. *Luke* ſpeak of their Perſuaſion, that this was *he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*, as paſt and at an End[m]. Yet, as all this aroſe from Infirmity, not Wickedneſs, they met with an eaſy Pardon; and ſo will others like them. But few of thoſe, whom Senſuality, and fewer ſtill, whom vain Self-opinion leads to Scepticiſm, ever recover themſelves. And as this affords no ſmall Confirmation to the awful Doctrine of the Text: ſo it ſhould warn all from taking ſo much as the firſt Steps in that fatal Path, from which Men ſo ſeldom return: but eſpecially againſt ſetting out with treating Religion and Morals in a ſcornful and ludicrous Manner; which is di-

[m] Luke xxiv. 21.

rectly oppoſite to modeſt and humble Inquiry; manifeſts a very criminal Partiality, as well as Sufficiency; and naturally terminates in a complete Diſregard to every Thing wiſe and good.

Thus much concerning Infidels and Apoſtates. Chriſtians, while they continue ſuch, are in very little Danger of committing the Sin, condemned in the Text. Some indeed have imagined, that every deliberate Tranſgreſſion amounted to it, and was unpardonable; becauſe the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* ſaith, that *if we ſin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgement*[n]. But then it appears very plainly, that not any wilful Sin whatever is meant there, but that one only, which is mentioned immediately before and after; laying aſide *the Profeſſion of the Faith, treading under Foot the Son of God, counting the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing, doing Deſpite unto the Spirit of Grace:* that is, renouncing and reviling Chriſtianity. And it by no Means follows, that becauſe they, who have rejected *Chriſt*, will no where find any other Atonement for their Sins, therefore they who believe in him, but have criminally

[n] Heb. x. 26, 27.

violated

violated ſome of his Precepts, cannot partake of his Atonement, though they apply for it with penitent Hearts. It is very true, St. *John* hath told us, *there is a Sin unto Death*, at leaſt was in thoſe Days, of which if any one was guilty, he could give no Encouragement to *pray for him*[o]. But the whole Scripture tells us, that not every wilful Sin is certainly unto Death: and our Saviour in the Text hath told us, that only the *Blaſphemy*, the malicious Evil-ſpeaking, *againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is ſuch. Now they who believe in the Father and the Son cannot ſurely think ill either of the Perſon or the Operations of the Spirit; and therefore cannot be ordinarily tempted to ſpeak ill of them, with any real Meaning of what they ſay: and unmeaning profane Expreſſions, though undoubtedly very full of Guilt, and likely to produce more and greater Guilt, are yet far from that moſt abandoned Wickedneſs, to which the Paſſage before us relates.

Sometimes indeed Chriſtians, and very good ones, may accuſe themſelves of having entertained irreverent Thoughts, and, it may be, ſpoken irreverent Words of Religion, of the Scriptures, of the Holy Spirit himſelf: but this

[o] 1 John v. 16.

hath been, when they were under ſo peculiar a Diſturbance of Mind, that they had not the Command of their Thoughts or Words: and then they may be abſolutely ſure, that the all-knowing, juſt, and good God will not conſider theſe Offences, as, in a moral Senſe, theirs. In ſome Diſorders, it is no more poſſible for Men to hinder wicked Thoughts from taking Poſſeſſion of their Minds, or blaſphemous Words from coming out of their Mouths, than to hinder any other Diſtemper, (for plainly this is one) which may attack any other Part of them, from ſhewing itſelf by its common Effects. And it is no more a Crime, when they are in ſuch a Condition, to utter Things even againſt God; than it is for a Child, in Convulſions or light-headed, to ſtrike its Parent. And though they may not think themſelves diſordered, and in other Reſpects may not be ſo; yet in this Want of Self-government, proportionably to the Degree of it, they certainly are. And it makes no Difference at all with Regard to their Innocence, whether the Diſorder be a natural bodily one, affecting the Mind; which is notoriouſly the common Caſe, though attended ſometimes with very unaccountable Symptoms; or whether it ariſe from the Suggeſtions of the wicked one.

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For as he tempted Chriſt himſelf, ſo he hath ever ſince moleſted Chriſtians; and often ſuggeſted the worſt of Things to the beſt of Men. Our Words indeed, notwithſtanding ſuch Temptations, we may for the moſt Part reſtrain: but we can by no Means always prevent Impreſſions being made on our Imaginations: and how ſtrongly ſoever any one may experience them to be made on his, ſtill the wicked Thoughts, which he laments all the while, is terrified at, and almoſt in Agonies about, certainly do not proceed from his own Will and Choice; and for that Reaſon, far from being unpardonable Sins, they are in Truth no Sins at all; but grievous Afflictions, for which God will hereafter reward him, if he endeavours to ſuffer them patiently. This you would immediately perceive, and ſay, in the Caſe of any other Perſon: and therefore, when Occaſion requires, you ſhould ſay it to yourſelf. But if you cannot, or if it proves to no great Purpoſe, nay to ſo little that you are driven to the very Borders of Deſpair, yet Deſpair itſelf, ſo far as it is a mere Diſeaſe, is not an Offence againſt God.

But then, how remote ſoever we are from committing the Sin, which cannot be pardoned; we may too eaſily commit ſuch, as will

not be pardoned: for none will, without true Repentance. And every Tranſgreſſion either invites or drives us into repeated and worſe Tranſgreſſions, which inſenſibly ſo *harden us through their Deceitfulneſs* [p], that though, while the *Day of Salvation* [q] continues, we always may repent, it becomes leſs and leſs likely, that we ever ſhall. And even if we do, we ſhall, notwithſtanding, even in this World, uſually be great Sufferers one Way or another: and, unleſs we become uncommonly zealous in our Duty, ſhall attain a much lower Degree of Happineſs in the next. Bear in your Minds therefore the Son of *Sirach*'s Words: *Flee from Sin, as from the Face of a Serpent: for if thou comeſt too near it, it will bite thee: the Teeth thereof are as the Teeth of a Lion, ſlaying the Souls of Men. All Iniquity is as a two-edged Sword, the Wounds whereof cannot be healed* [r]: cannot be healed at all, without Danger and Difficulty and Pain; nor ſo perfectly at beſt, but that ſtill either Weakneſs, or Scars and Deformities however, will be left behind. Let us therefore carefully avoid all Sin: but particularly avoid all Sins relating to

[p] Heb. iii. 13. [q] 2 Cor. vi. 2. [r] Eccluſ. xxi. 2, 3.

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the Holy Ghoſt, and practiſe all Duties relating to him: that ſo, abiding in his Fellowſhip, being ſupported by his Teſtimony, and rejoicing in his Comfort, we may at length be *ſealed with the Spirit of Promiſe, the Earneſt of that Inheritance*[s], to which, &c.

[s] Eph. i. 13, 14.

SERMON X.

MATTH. xii. 36.

But I say unto you, that every idle Word, that Men shall speak, they shall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgement.

OUR blessed Saviour, whenever his Hearers were Persons of well-disposed Minds, and free from Prejudices, taught them the Duties of Religion in the plainest Terms. But Length of Time, and Difference of Language, have made some of his Expressions, even on such Occasions, hard to be understood, or liable to be misunderstood: and hence, unless we are both upright and considerate, may arise Mistakes of great Importance. For if we interpret these Passages with too much Indulgence to ourselves, as human Nature is very prone to do, we corrupt the Purity of his Precepts, and en-

endanger our own Salvation: firſt aiming at leſs than we ought, then of Courſe falling ſhort of that. And yet the oppoſite Extreme, of ſtraining them too high, hath ſeldom done Good, and often Harm: hath deterred weak Spirits from taking the Burthen of Religion upon them, entangled ſcrupulous Tempers with endleſs Perplexities, and made rigid ones uncharitable and ſuperſtitious: given the Enemies of Chriſtianity Opportunities of declaiming againſt it, as unnaturally ſevere; and tempted the careleſs Profeſſors of it, after rejecting, as they well might, the over-ſtrict Senſe of ſuch Phraſes, not to take the Pains of looking for any other; but go on, unreſtrained by them, to live as they pleaſe.

Thus it hath happened in Relation to the Text of Scripture, which I have juſt read to you. Some few, underſtanding by *every idle Word*, every needleſs or trifling one; and by *giving Account*, being condemned; have either forced themſelves to an abſurd Reſervedneſs and Silence in Company, or been very uneaſy, that they were unable to do it; while the profane have ridiculed both them and the Goſpel, on that Account. But the Generality of Mankind, ſoon perceiving, that this could not be

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the Meaning of the Words, have never concerned themſelves to inquire what was; but have freely taken all the ſame Liberties in Diſcourſe, as if no ſuch Warning had ever been given by our bleſſed Lord.

Now that he was far from the Intention of laying down unſociable Rules for Behaviour, his whole Character ſufficiently ſhews; which was in no Reſpect harſh and auſtere, but humane and converſible. The whole Temper of his Religion proves it yet more fully: it is an *eaſy Yoke* [a]; it enjoins *whatſoever Things are lovely and of good Report* [b]; it enjoins particularly, *being courteous* [c]; of which being affable is a material Part: and this can never conſiſt with diſapproving, as unlawful, every Word that might have been ſpared. Diſcourſe on Subjects of little or no Importance is as neceſſary, at Times, for the Relaxation of our Minds, as Exerciſe without Buſineſs for the Refreſhment of our Bodies. It is a proper Exertion of that Chearfulneſs, which God hath plainly deſigned us to ſhew, on ſmall Occaſions, as well as great. Beſides, it wins and engages thoſe, whom ſpeechleſs or ſententious Gravity might not only diſpleaſe, but prepoſſeſs againſt every Thing

[a] Matth. xi. 30. [b] Phil. iv. 8. [c] 1 Pet. iii. 8.

good:

good: whereas obſerving, even in ſlight Matters, the Apoſtle's Rule, of *graceful Speech*, (for ſo the beſt Interpreters underſtand what is tranſlated *Speech with Grace*) *ſeaſoned with Salt, that we may know how we ought to anſwer every Man*[d], both expreſſes and increaſes mutual Good-will; and enables us, from being innocently entertaining, to become ſeriouſly uſeful. We may be ſure therefore, that whatever Diſcourſe hath this general good Tendency, and no bad one, be there otherwiſe ever ſo little Uſe or Significancy in it, cannot be in any blameable Senſe, *idle Words*.

And indeed, if we look into what precedes the Text, we ſhall find it was not occaſioned by Perſons ſaying more than they needed, but other Things than they ought. And therefore learned Men have ſuppoſed this Phraſe, of *idle Words*, to be one of thoſe many, in all Writers, which imply more than they expreſs. In Scripture, *unfruitful Works of Darkneſs*[e] means pernicious Works: what *is unprofitable for you*[f], means, what would be hurtful to you. In common Speech, a worthleſs Man is one, who, beſides having no Good, hath much Harm in him. And thus they underſtand an *idle Word* to be

[d] Col. iv. 6. [e] Eph. v. 11. [f] Heb. xiii. 17.

not

not merely an uſeleſs, but a falſe Aſſertion, which is almoſt always, at the ſame Time, in one Way or other, an injurious one: ſuch as evidently thoſe were, of which our Saviour is here ſpeaking. An Interpretation, that undoubtedly removes all Appearance of Harſhneſs from this Part of his Doctrine, and is not without Support from the Uſe of the Term in old Writers. Yet ſtill, the ſolemn Form of Introduction, *But I ſay unto you*, ſeldom, if ever, uſed by him, when he taught only common and known Truths, inclines one ſtrongly to look for ſomewhat farther, than a bare Declaration, that injurious and calumniating Language is ſinful. And, in Fact, the Expreſſion, *idle Words*, in the *Jewiſh* Language, ſometimes denotes all ſuch, as make up the careleſs eaſy Converſation of our Leiſure-Time: agreeably to which, the Writers in it mention them, often with Contempt, or lower Marks of Diſlike, as there is too often Cauſe: but now and then alſo with a Degree of Praiſe: as when a noted Commentator of theirs, who lived above 500 Years ago [g], explains that Paſſage in the firſt Pſalm, *His Leaf alſo ſhall not wither*, from Rabbins yet older than himſelf, thus: that

[g] R. David Kimchi.

even the idle Talk, ſo he expreſſes it, *of a good Man ought to be regarded:* the moſt ſuperfluous Things he ſaith, are always of ſome Value. And other ancient Authors have the ſame Phraſe nearly in the ſame Senſe.

Our Saviour therefore probably intended here to ſay, that *we ſhall give an Account, in the Day of Judgement,* of our moſt unguarded and unmeaning Diſcourſe. Not that we ſhall be charged with the Whole of it, as criminal. God forbid! We may as well be charged with every needleſs inarticulate Sound, or bodily Geſture [h]. The Apoſtle ſpeaks of Perſons *giving* their *Account with Joy* [i]. And ſo may we give ours, even concerning this Part of our Converſation, if we take Care to be ſuch as we ought. For *make the Tree good:* and both *the Fruit* [k] and the Leaves will be ſo too. The full Senſe of the Text then is, that not only our ſtudied and deliberate, but our ſlighter and more negligent Words, as well as Actions, will, in Proportion to their Weight, have an Influence on the future Determination of our everlaſting State. It appears, from what goes

[h] And indeed the Stoic Doctrine was: *Digitum exere, peccas.* Perſ. Sat. V. v. 119.

[i] Heb. xiii. 17. [k] Matth. xii. 33.

before,

before, that ſome of the *Jews* had been maliciouſly aſcribing the Miracles of Chriſt to infernal Powers. Others, without Queſtion, as it always happens, had thoughtleſsly taken up and ſpread the Notion, which they had heard. He therefore, after confuting the former, lets the latter alſo know their Share of the Guilt, by adding, that, on every Occaſion, *out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth ſpeaketh. A good Man, out of the good Treaſure of the Heart, bringeth forth good Things: and an evil Man, out of the evil Treaſure, bringeth forth evil Things.* Then he goes on: *But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word, that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgement. For by thy Words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy Words thou ſhalt be condemned*[1].

Deſigned Expreſſions, in Diſcourſe, of Impiety towards God, Injuſtice to Man, Diſregard to Virtue or Decency, can proceed only from an abandoned Heart. But the Converſation of moſt Perſons is full of unobſerved Faults and bad Tendencies: which, like a Multitude of ſmall Expences, make us Debtors beyond what we could imagine: and by con-

[1] Matth. xii. 34—37.

tinual, though ſlighter Impreſſions on our Morals and Piety, gradually undermine what the moſt violent open Aſſault could not have overturned. Each particular Offence appears a Trifle: ſome, taken alone, almoſt imperceptible: they diſguiſe themſelves under the Shew of that chearful Freedom, without which human Life would be quite uncomfortable: and thus a Number of Enemies, entering ſingle, form a Body at Length, that maſters the Place. Now though it may ſeem no great Overſight to admit one or two of theſe; yet not to be alarmed as they increaſe upon us, is unpardonable Want of Care. Therefore, to acquaint ourſelves better with the Danger, and the Means of guarding againſt it, let us conſider, how common it is to ſpeak in a very unfit Manner, chiefly through Inconſiderateneſs, of Religion, moral Virtue, and one another.

I. Of Religion. Both Prudence and good Breeding, not to ſay, a little Diſtruſt of their own Abilities and Impartiality, might induce even thoſe, who have examined its Authority and doubt of its Truth, if any ſuch there be, ſtill to be ſhy of declaring againſt what many others, and poſſibly ſome of equal Abilities, after as full an Examination, hold ſacred. And yet

ſuch

ſuch as have never examined in the leaſt, nor once put a Queſtion to themſelves about it, can, with a moſt contemptuous Negligence, take for granted the Falſehood of the moſt awful Truths, and talk upon that Suppoſition, in ſo aſſured and eaſy a Manner, as if Nobody differed from them. Whenever they do chance to hear of an Argument, that ſeems to make for them, they applaud it, even without underſtanding it. But a Jeſt they look on, as ſuperior to all Argument: and if any Text of Scripture can have an unfair ludicrous Turn given it, or any Article of Faith be miſrepreſented into an Abſurdity, this they triumph in, without Mercy. Now whatever Excuſe there may be for the Doubts, or the Miſtakes, of inquiſitive and humble Minds: yet when the ignorant or thoughleſs take upon them to deſpiſe the Laws of Heaven, without Pretence for it; and make the nobleſt Hopes of human Nature, the Theme of their Scorn and Ridicule: this is a moſt heinous Kind of idle Diſcourſe.

But there is another Sort, though not ſo ſhocking yet more extenſively miſchievous; when they, who profeſs Religion, and think they are ſerious in the Profeſſion, as ſurely, if it be a

Truth, it is the moſt ſerious one that can be, allow themſelves inadvertently in ſaying what tends to its Ruin: when they ſpeak with Diſregard of the appointed Methods of ſupporting it in the World: when they join in looſe Harangues againſt Enthuſiaſm and Superſtition, without putting in due Cautions to diſtinguiſh them from the moſt rational Feelings of Love, and Marks of Reſpect, to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, which Chriſtianity hath enjoined: when they, who by no Means intend to be profane, repeat the profane Things that others have ſaid or done, with Indulgence and Pleaſure: when they carry on Diſcourſe, that reflects upon Doctrines, which they themſelves inwardly believe; and treat Duties with Indifference, or even Contempt, which at the ſame Time they acknowledge, and, it may be, practiſe, as Duties. This unmeaning Compliance with faſhionable Talk, which they might eaſily avoid, yet not be remarkable; or if they were, it would be to their Honour; brings them by Degrees to think ſlightly of what they have been affecting to ſpeak ſlightly of; till their Piety waſtes away into an empty Form: and it is ſeldom long, before they grow aſhamed of even that. Thus is their *Mouth their Deſtruction, and their Lips the Snare of their Souls.*

Souls [m]. At leaſt they lead others into a wrong Way, who are afterwards tempted to go farther; they permit themſelves to be ſuſpected; they deſert the Defence of Religion, when it wants all poſſible Help; and are falſe to their own Cauſe. All good Men therefore ſhould be very careful, that their outward Appearance do not contradict their inward Faith. Doubtleſs there are Seaſons, in which Pleaſantry is proper: but there are Subjects, on which it is never proper; and Religion is one. Abruptly intruding grave Maxims into the Midſt of Mirth, without any Thing to call for them, would be diſguſtful and abſurd. But ſtill, whatever Difference of Manner different Occaſions may require, as they certainly require a very great one; we ſhould always continue the ſame in our gayeſt Hours, that we are in our moſt ſerious; and preſerve an Uniformity of Character throughout. Nor can there be any Character more conſiſtent or amiable, than theirs, whom dutiful Regard to the greateſt and beſt of Beings influences, not only to be juſt and good in their Behaviour, but ſometimes inſtructive, ſometimes entertaining, always innocent, in their Converſation.

[m] Prov. xviii. 7.

This Head of irreligious idle Words could not have been concluded, without ſevere Animadverſions on the monſtrous Cuſtom of unmeaning Oaths and Imprecations, if the Sinfulneſs of it were not ſo notorious, and ſo often ſet before you, that I hope you can have no Doubt, but ſuch Language will be a dreadful Article of Account in the Day of Judgement. Let us therefore proceed to conſider,

II. What Sort of Uſage moral Virtue frequently meets with, in our familiar Diſcourſe; not from any premeditated Deſign againſt it; for that belongs to another Subject; but principally through Inadvertency. How favourably are moſt of us apt to ſpeak even of groſs Vices, when high Rank, or ſuperficial Agreeableneſs, give them a falſe Luſtre: and how commonly do we treat the baſeſt and moſt cruel Behaviour, that Men are guilty of in Purſuit of their Pleaſure, as Matter of Diverſion only; as no Exceptions againſt their Characters, but rather perhaps a Kind of Recommendation! How imperfectly ſometimes is the Decency of Converſation preſerved amongſt Perſons of tolerably good Repute: in direct Contradiction to the Apoſtle's Precept, *Let no corrupt Communication*

proceed

proceed out of your Mouth[h]: and with what ſtrange Indulgence are Offences of this Kind uſually received! How thoughtleſsly do many applaud and propagate vile Notions of human Nature, that tend only to make it yet viler; and gratify a prepoſterous Vanity, by repreſenting their Species worſe, than it is. Concerning themſelves indeed, the Patrons of ſuch Opinions may, in a good Meaſure, deſerve Belief. Yet even they are not quite ſo bad, as they abſurdly endeavour to have it imagined, all Mankind are! How many again will defend Immoralities, of which they would by no Means be guilty: and are profligate in their Diſcourſe, while they are regular in their Lives! Nor doth it content us always, by our idle Talk to keep Wickedneſs in Countenance: but we lay Virtue under poſitive Diſcouragements. Modeſty and Chaſtity, in one Sex at leaſt, with too many is a Matter of great Raillery. Of Uprightneſs and Honeſty, on ſome Occaſions, we ſpeak with but a contemptuous Kind of Approbation at beſt. Patience and Forgiveneſs of Injuries we treat as downright Mean-ſpiritedneſs; Diſcretion in Conduct, as a formal diſagreeable Thing; Frugality as an odious one, though requiſite for

[h] Eph. iv. 29.

the Purpoſes of Juſtice, or made ſubſervient to thoſe of Charity. But eſpecially where diſadvantageous Peculiarities throw any Thing of a Shade on the trueſt Merit; we are extremely apt to condemn and ridicule in the Groſs, what, however clouded, we ought to diſtinguiſh, and mention with due Honour. A little Ungracefulneſs of Behaviour, or Meanneſs of Appearance, or Defect in Point of Abilities, or Ignorance of the World, though accompanied with a worthy Heart, ſhall provoke a harder Cenſure from us, than a miſchievous Turn of Mind, or a vicious Courſe of Behaviour: nay we can fancy Circumſtances, when we find none, to render good Qualities deſpicable. Then while we thus depreciate real Virtues, we exalt imaginary ones into their Places: falſe Honour, falſe Good-nature; which lead often to the worſt of Crimes, and diſguiſe them under the beſt of Names. In ſhort, the Converſation, even of thoſe who are counted virtuous, by others and themſelves, goes a great deal too much, without their attending to it, on Maxims directly contrary to the Principles which they avow: and places both the Conduct and Enjoyment of Life upon a wrong Footing. For Inſtance: Are we not perpetually ſpeaking of this

this preſent World, as if it were our All: nay, of the outward Shew of Things here, as if it were the true and only Happineſs of Man? What Impreſſion muſt this make, by Degrees, on the Minds of thoſe who hear us: indeed on our own? By thoughtleſsly talking thus upon miſtaken Suppoſitions, we ſhall come at Length to forget they are ſuch; and act at leaſt like thoſe, who think them true. But let us now conſider,

III. How wrongly we treat each other, in our careleſs eaſy Diſcourſe; not from deliberate ill Will, but by Way of Amuſement.

One raiſes an idle Story, to divert the Company, at the Expence of a Perſon, who, it may be, hath not given the leaſt Ground for it. A ſecond catches what he hears; perhaps believes it too haſtily; perhaps doth not believe it, but tells it notwithſtanding: a third fills it up with plauſible Circumſtances: the general Voice repeats it: and then, what every one ſays, paſſes for certain: eſpecially if the Compoſition be ſeaſoned with a ſmall Spice of Wit, it is univerſally reliſhed, and laſts for a long Time. But if beſides, it leſſens an honourable Character; inſtead of doubting, or being ſorry, People echo it with immoderate Joy: and yet every

one

one thinks himſelf clear of all Blame, becauſe he means only Entertainment. Poſſibly he did: and yet, as neither he, nor they that heard him, would have been near ſo much entertained with a good Report, as an ill one; there is almoſt always at the Bottom of this Practice, a latent Malignity of Heart againſt our Fellow-Creatures; *our Brethren, for whom Chriſt died*[o], and whom both Nature and Religion command us to love. But whatever the Principle be, the Effects are very bad. Unthinking Licentiouſneſs of Speech, concerning Perſons of high Rank, may endanger even a Nation's Peace. And yet what Numbers are there, that will venture to aſſert, without the leaſt Diffidence, whatever ſuits their Humour, on Matters, which perhaps they know Nothing of: and when once they are got into the Road of Talk, quicken their Pace, without perceiving it; and will go any Length, to keep one another Company: ſo that, to uſe the Terms of Scripture, the *Beginning of the Words of their Mouth is Fooliſhneſs: and the End, miſchievous Madneſs*[p]. But in private Life, no one can tell, what unhappy Conſequences a falſe Report to the Diſadvantage of another, though

[o] Rom. xiv. 15. [p] Eccl. x. 13.

ſeemingly

ſeemingly in a Trifle, may have. Or if it were a true Report; let us aſk ourſelves, how could our Tempers, how indeed would our Characters bear, that every Thing, which is true of us, ſhould be ſpread abroad? And were the Perſon, who had done it, to ſay in his own Defence, that he had no Deſign of hurting us; when however he had no Regard, whether he hurt us or not; would this appear a ſufficient Plea? The Harm done is not the leſs, often the greater, for the negligent Manner it is done in. That procures Belief: whereas apparent Malice, or Paſſion, would render what we ſay ſuſpected. Beſides, Anger is frequently founded on Provocations, that a little excuſe the Injuries it doth: but indolently treading under Foot the Reputations of others, is wanton Cruelty; that with the gayeſt Indifference delivers Perſons over to Reproach or Contempt, it may be for Life, rather than an ill-natured Story, or a lucky Turn of Words, ſhall be loſt; that puts the good Name of another, on which his All may depend, into the Balance, and lets the Love of Talk, the Vanity of having early Intelligence, or any other ſilly Fancy, outweigh it. Every one ſhould ſtrive indeed to make ſuch Converſation harmleſs, by expreſſing a Diſ-

Diſregard and Diſlike to it. But, as this will never be done effectually; ſo, if it were, the Guilt of theſe charitable Communicators would be much the ſame; for they certainly did not deſign to be thus inſignificant.

There is yet another, and frequently a more fatal Way ſtill, of injuring others by unmeaning Diſcourſe: when, merely to enliven the preſent Hour, we give them, with falſe Civility, a higher Opinion of their own Accompliſhments, or our Eſteem of them, or good Intentions towards them, than we ought. Many ridiculous Miſtakes, and many ſerious Inconveniences, are Men thus drawn into: they loſe the little Knowledge they had of themſelves; affect what miſbecomes them, attempt what they are unequal to; and take wrong Steps in Life, that always expoſe and often ruin them: to the great Diverſion, ſometimes, of thoſe, who ſhould be otherwiſe moved at ſeeing the Miſchief to which they have contributed.

Theſe Inſtances, without ſeeking for more, abundantly ſhew the Need of watching over our freeſt and eaſieſt Converſation, and the Juſtice of its undergoing God's final Cenſure. *Lo, there is not a Word in my Tongue, but thou, O Lord,*

O Lord, knoweſt it altogether[q]. And whatever he obſerves whether good or bad in us, the righteous Judge of the whole Earth will accordingly reward or puniſh. Perhaps we may not particularly foreſee the Harm we do by our irreligious, immoral, or injurious idle Words: but we cannot help foreſeeing, that not a little may ariſe from them: and it muſt be, in general, a wrong Turn of Mind, that prompts us to them. For as *the Fruit declareth if the Tree have been dreſſed; ſo is the Utterance of a Conceit in the Heart of Man*[r]. It is very true, that the Government of the Tongue at all Times is a Matter of great Difficulty: and *if any one offend not in Word, the ſame is a perfect Man*[s], indeed. But ſtill we might offend much leſs than we do, and approach much nearer to this Perfection, would we but often recollect, *that for theſe Things* alſo *God will bring us into Judgment*[t]: a Conſideration, that ſhould make us, like the Pſalmiſt, *keep our Mouth, as it were with a Bridle*[u].

Poſſibly it may be objected, that ſuch Attention as this would embarraſs Converſation with endleſs Reſtraints, which will make it

[q] Pſ. cxxxix. 3. [r] Eccluſ. xxvii. 6. [s] James iii. 2.
[t] Eccl. xi. 9. [u] Pſ. xxxix. 2.

quite

quite diſagreeable: and the Awe of Religion in our chearful Moments, damp the whole Pleaſure of Society. Nor can it be denied, that obſerving Rules in their Diſcourſe, would, to ſome Perſons, for ſome Time, be a grievous Taſk. But ſo it is in every Thing that we undertake to learn, eſpecially if we have learnt wrong before: and yet we ſhall never learn to good Purpoſe, without obſerving Rules: and the cloſer Pains we take at firſt, the more graceful and eaſier Figure we ſhall make afterwards, in Performances of any Kind. Men of Underſtanding and Application may ſoon qualify themſelves to be very entertaining on harmleſs and uſeful Subjects: and conſequently running into others muſt imply, either low Abilities, or bad Diſpoſitions, or criminal Thoughtleſsneſs. But if Converſation doth loſe, by due Regulations, a little of its Poignancy; it loſes its Venom too: and ſurely the Delight of hearing, or ſaying, improper lively Things, may well be given up, to avoid the exquiſite Uneaſineſs they ſometimes cauſe, and the various ill Effects they generally have. As for the Awe of Religion: were it in our Choice, whether there ſhould be an Inſpector of our Actions and Words and Thoughts, or not; it might

deſerve

deſerve Conſideration, what Influence on the Comfort of our Beings that Inſpection would have. But ſince we know there is one, under whoſe Eye we live continually; our only Concern is to ſuit our Behaviour to this our Condition, be it more pleaſing, or be it leſs. Not that in Reality there could be a happier, than Subjection to his fatherly Care, who conſiders our Frame, and *knoweth whereof we are made*[w]: who hath given us every Principle of Joy and Delight, that belongs to our Nature; and approves of the innocent Uſe of them all. But then the moſt indulgent Superior, that will preſerve himſelf a Superior, as God aſſuredly will, muſt require ſo much Regard to his Preſence, as ſhall reſtrain us, not only from wilful and flagrant Offences, but from that ſupine Negligence, which, though it be ſhewn in leſſer Inſtances only, yet, by the inceſſant Repetition of them, argues great Diſregard; ſuch, that, were we to conſider ourſelves only as God's Creatures, we ſhould be obliged to avoid conſcientiouſly. But if we conſider ourſelves as fallen, ſinful, redeemed Creatures, redeemed by the Love of him, whom *if we love we muſt keep his Commandments*[x], and whoſe

[w] Pſ. ciii. 14. [x] John xiv. 15.

Wrath

Wrath we ſhall not *eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation*[y], here will be additional Motives of the ſtrongeſt Sort, not only to *ſet a Watch before our Mouths, and keep the Door of our Lips*[z], but to *purify our Hearts*[a], through Faith in him: and when we have thus, for there is no other Way, *healed the Fountain, then it will ſend forth ſweet Water*[b]; then, if the Senſe of our Obligations, and our Danger, in this Reſpect, ſhould, as it will, by repreſenting Converſation in a different Light, from what we had ſeen it in before, moderate our Fondneſs for it; leſſen the Time we ſpend in it, and the Share we take to ourſelves of it; make us cautious of ſaying more than hath at leaſt a general good Tendency, and careful to a greater Degree, in Proportion as we are obliged to live more in Company, and as our Diſcourſe will be more regarded there: we ſhall plainly perceive, that no Manner of Harm follows, but more Good than a little, by the Leiſure we thus gain for ſerious Thought, valuable Books, and requiſite Employments of ſeveral Kinds. A more thorough Acquaintance, in Retirement, with our-

[y] Heb. ii. 3. [z] Pſ. cxli. 3. [a] Acts xv. 9.
[b] 2 Kings ii. 21. James iii. 11.

ſelves

ſelves and our Duty, our own Affairs and uſeful Knowledge, will ſend us back into Company, from Time to Time, greatly improved, both in proper Subjects of Diſcourſe, and proper Cautions for ſpeaking of them in ſuch a Manner, as to be at once agreeable, innocent, and inſtructive. Thus prepared by the cool Reflections of Solitude, we might enjoy the full Pleaſure of Society, without any Remorſe enſuing: and turn that Part of our Lives, in which too commonly our beſt Inclinations wither away, and many bad ones take deep Root, into a continual Exerciſe of benefiting our Fellow-Creatures, and advancing ourſelves in the Favour of our Maker. For, to any one thus diſpoſed, numberleſs Opportunities would occur, at ſuch Times, of *Communication, which is good to the Uſe of edifying and miniſtering Grace unto the Hearers* [c]: Opportunities of making Religion and Morals look chearful and amiable; of inſinuating ſeaſonable Advice; of ſoftening rugged Tempers; of confirming right Reſolutions, and putting wrong Behaviour out of Countenance. And in Proportion as the natural or acquired Abilities of Men are

[c] Eph. iv. 29.

greater, or their Rank ſecures to them more Regard, the more extenſively ſerviceable they may be in this Way. But where all theſe Advantages meet together in an eminent Degree, it is inexpreſſible, what Bleſſings to Mankind they, who enjoy them, might be, would they but uſe them well. For then, not only the buſier Part of their Time would be ſpent in promoting Piety and Virtue, Prudence and Happineſs; but their moſt diſengaged and freeſt Hours become Seaſons of delightful Improvement to all about them: in which, imitating the kindly Influences of Heaven, *their Doctrine would drop as the Rain, their Speech diſtil as the Dew: as the ſmall Rain upon the tender Herb, and as the Showers upon the Graſs* [d].

[d] Deut. xxxii. 2.

SERMON XI.

MATTH. xiii. 16.

But bleſſed are your Eyes, for they ſee; and your Ears, for they hear.

OUR Saviour, in the Parable of the Sower, which occaſioned theſe Words, compares the Reception of his Doctrine in the Hearts of Men to that of Seed in different Sorts of Ground. Some are like the High-way, beaten and hard, an open Thorough-fare to all Comers and Goers: there it lies looſe on the Surface, and is immediately cruſhed under Foot, or *devoured by the Fowls of the Air:* the very firſt Suggeſtion of the Devil, the World, or the Fleſh, deſtroys at once the Effect of all the Inſtruction in their Duty that is given them. Others reſemble a light, but ſhallow Soil, with a Rock underneath: where the Seed quickly ſprings up, but is quickly alſo ſcorched and withered. They

are glad to believe, and forward to profeſs, what promiſes the Favour of God and future Happineſs; but impenetrable to all Attempts of a thorough Change within: bad Inclination reſiſts firmly at the Bottom, while external Performances make a ſpecious Appearance to the Eye. Whenever the Time comes, that they are to ſuffer or loſe any Thing for doing their Duty, this is much too difficult a Service for them; they have no Root ſufficient to furniſh them with Strength to bear it; they are burnt up, and ſhrivel away to Nothing. In a third Sort, the Seed of the Word takes deeper Hold, and makes very ſtrong and promiſing Shoots: but Thorns and bad Weeds, the earlier Poſſeſſors of the Field, riſe up and choak it. For theſe grow of themſelves: but it requires Culture, and Watchfulneſs to root them out: inſtead of which, too many plant them in the Midſt of the Corn, intangle themſelves, without Need, in the Cares and Riches and Pleaſures of this Life, which they heedleſsly indulge, till every better Principle is weakened, overſhadowed and ſmothered. But ſtill there remains a fourth Sort, *who, in an honeſt and good Heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth Fruit*[a]; yet very un-

[a] Luke viii. 15.

equally,

equally, *some an hundred Fold, some sixty, some thirty.*

The Persons, to whom this Doctrine was delivered, gave immediate Proof of its Truth. The Generality, fond of the Shew of Religion, but dreading to undertake the Practice of it in earnest, *hearing heard not, and seeing saw not* [b], to any useful Purpose, what in this Form of Speech our Saviour laid before them: as indeed he declares he knew would be their Case, and therefore designedly used a Manner of Expression, which they would not take the Trouble, small as it was, to understand [c]. For such neither deserved plainer Instructions, nor would have made any other than a bad Use of them; which could only have increased their Guilt. Nay, his Disciples themselves apprehended his Meaning, though obvious enough, but imperfectly; and desired to have it explained to them [d]. This however shewed a good Disposition: and therefore he not only condescends to their Request, but assures them it was a Happiness unspeakable to have any Degree of proper Attention to, and serious Sense of, a Thing so infinitely important, as God's Word. *Blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears, for*

[b] Matth. xiii. 14. [c] Ib. [d] Luke viii. 9.

they hear. A Truth, which, though applicable more eminently, beyond Compariſon, to thoſe who heard and ſaw the Word of Life himſelf, yet muſt hold in Proportion of all, who are taught, by the Miniſtry of his Servants, the Chriſtian Doctrine. This Paſſage then aſſerts in a ſtrong Manner the Benefit of religious Inſtruction: which many appear, unhappily for themſelves and others, to undervalue exceedingly.

Indeed we are all very apt to overlook and ſlight the Advantages, that we have long enjoyed without Interruption, even in our worldly Affairs. Health and Plenty, Safety and Liberty, excite in us very little Thankfulneſs: but the Things of another, and, we imagine, diſtant Life, make a ſtill fainter Impreſſion. Hence great Numbers thoughtleſsly diſregard Religion: and ſome avowedly diſbelieve it. No Wonder, if many of theſe think teaching it needleſs, or even hurtful. But others alſo, who profeſs to acknowledge the Duties, that we owe to our Creator, of a ſober, and righteous, and godly Life; yet maintain, that in Goodneſs, nay Juſtice, he is bound to make them, and in Fact hath made them all, ſo evident by Nature to every Man, that we want no farther Information to know the Whole of them. But how do they prove

prove this? The Goodneſs of God is extended to his various Creatures in Degrees extremely different; and none is intitled to claim this Degree or that. The Juſtice of God permits him to give as low Capacities to Men as he pleaſes; and binds him only to require, in Proportion to what he gives. Why then may he not put us under a Neceſſity of learning from each other, in a great Meaſure, the Way to future Happineſs, as well as the Methods of procuring to ourſelves the Conveniences and Neceſſaries of common Life? Should we not be wretchedly furniſhed with theſe, indeed ſhould we be able to ſubſiſt, were each Generation, each Man, to provide them for his own Uſe, without being previouſly taught[e]? And muſt we not have been much more at a Loſs in Matters of a moral and ſpiritual Nature? We are endued with Reaſon: but we ſhould apply it very little, if at all, to Subjects of this Kind; and make a very ſlow Progreſs in them, if we did; unleſs Education, that is, Inſtruction, opened the Way, and directed our Steps. We have an inbred Senſe of Good and Evil, which enables

[e] Neque tam eſt acris acies in naturis hominum & ingeniis, ut res tantas quiſquam, niſi monſtratas, poſſit videre; neque tanta tamen in rebus obſcuritas, ut eas non penitus acri vir ingenio cernat, ſi modo aſpexerit. Cic. de Or. l. 3. § 31.

us, in many Things, *of ourſelves to judge what is right* [f]. But then, however it comes to paſs, which our boaſted Faculties will ſcarce be able to tell us, this moral Perception is by no Means perfect or diſtinct; and it is mixed with Paſſions and Appetites, far livelier and ſtronger, that frequently obſcure, and ſometimes pervert it. Still in Fact, the Duties of Life ſeem plain to moſt of us: and ſo we are tempted to conclude, there is no Occaſion for Inſtruction in them. But how came they to be thus plain? Why, principally becauſe we have always had Inſtruction. Conſider thoſe Nations that have little: for none are intirely deſtitute; every where Parents teach their Children, and all Men teach one another, ſomething: but ſtill is the Whole of their Duty plain to them? There are doubtleſs Parts of it, which they cannot well avoid underſtanding: and they might, with all their Diſadvantages, underſtand more than they do: but can they, every one of them, with Eaſe find out the Whole? How dreadful a Condemnation muſt they, who affirm this, paſs on Millions at once, for having found out ſo little? We Chriſtians are more charitable, and think their Darkneſs, though not a

[f] Luke xii. 57.

Juſtification,

Juſtification, yet a conſiderable Excuſe: but then we muſt inſiſt, that Light would be a great Bleſſing to them, and that Inſtruction is neceſſary to introduce it. For what wretched Ignorance of moſt evident, and what ſtrange Belief of moſt abſurd, Things, in Religion and Morals, doth all Hiſtory ſhew to have prevailed, for ſucceſſive Ages, through Nations, knowing and learned in other Reſpects, but untaught in this?

Nay, to look no farther than ourſelves: how many do we ſee of low Capacity, that, with the beſt Help, know little, and, with leſs, would ſcarce know any Thing? How many of better Capacity want Leiſure from worldly Cares, and would have no Time for Improvement, if the frequent Return of this Day did not give it them? How many, even with Leiſure, would never turn their Minds to the Conſideration of their Duty, if they were not called to it ſo loudly here, and Knowledge in a Manner forced upon them? How many indeed, of higher Rank as well as lower, appear after all very poorly grounded in the moſt important Principles and Precepts?

It muſt be conſidered too, that our own Reaſon, had we ever ſo much of it, and ever ſo much

Time and Inclination to uſe it, cannot teach us all that we are concerned to know; but there are Doctrines of the greateſt Moment to fallen Creatures, as we are, to be learnt from Revelation. Nor is it ſufficient, that each Man ſtudy theſe in the Bible for himſelf. God hath expreſsly provided, that ſome ſhall inſtruct others in them. Books, written in diſtant Countries and Ages, cannot be intelligible otherwiſe. And ſeveral very intereſting Parts of Scripture are plainly ſuch, that were moſt Men aſked, as the Eunuch was by Philip, *Underſtandeſt thou what thou readeſt?* they muſt anſwer, as he did, *How can I, except ſome Man ſhould guide me*[g]*?* And well may they admit ſuch Guides, as deſire to lead them, only by proving that the Way is right.

But further: were every ſingle Dictate, both of Reaſon and Revelation, ever ſo eaſy to be underſtood; yet the Number of them, ariſing from the various Relations, in which we ſtand to our Maker and our Fellow-creatures, is much too great to afford any Hope of their being all diſtinctly apprehended by all, unleſs it be made the Buſineſs of ſome, to point them out to the reſt. Or, though we could each, of our-

[g] Acts viii. 30, 31.

ſelves,

ſelves, form a general Notion of the Whole: yet particular Circumſtances often perplex a general Duty; and raiſe conſiderable Doubts, what ought to be done; where ſtill it is of great Conſequence to do right. The very wiſeſt frequently need Advice in ſuch Caſes: much more then muſt it be of ſtanding Uſe to others.

Beſides: what is in itſelf extremely evident may appear, to a prejudiced Mind, uncertain or abſurd. And it is very common for Men to be prejudiced greatly againſt plain Truths: ſometimes through Ignorance or Weakneſs; but much oftener, that wrong Belief may quiet them in wrong Practice. No one indeed can directly believe what he will, merely becauſe he will: but many have ſtrange Arts of miſrepreſenting Things, and putting fair Maſks upon foul Errors; which public Inſtruction is excellently fitted to pull off; and preſerve all, who are not obſtinate in cheating themſelves, from final Ruin. Minds, that have a wrong Bias, if ſuffered to proceed without Contradiction, would mould their Religion into almoſt any Shape they pleaſed: and great Numbers of well-meaning Perſons would either fall of their own Accord, or be led by others, into childiſh and hurtful Superſtitions. For human Nature hath always been

been found exceeding prone to them: and the preaching of the Gospel in its Purity is the safest and most effectual Preservative against them. But it is not Superstition, or Enthusiasm, alone, that endangers the Welfare of Mankind, whatever some would have us think. These undoubtedly may be pernicious: but Profaneness and Profligateness must: which in all Ages have been too generally practised, but in ours are openly defended. Such a Situation of Things makes it doubly necessary, that Religion and Virtue should have a full Hearing. Whoever barely wishes well to civil Society, cannot fail to be in some Degree concerned for their Support. And whoever is in earnest a Christian, will think it of the highest Importance, to the future as well as present Happiness of Men, that the Arguments for our holy Faith be proposed to the World in their genuine Force; the Objections, which may cause Uneasiness to good Minds, and furnish Matter of Triumph to bad ones, answered; and the disingenuous Artifices of Unbelievers exposed.

But making known to us what we have to do, to hope and to fear, is only the first Advantage of religious Instruction. Though we every one of us knew it completely already; yet

yet unleſs we always recollected it too, as often as there was Need, and were influenced by it, frequent Admonition would ſtill continue extremely uſeful. Very often the moſt acknowledged Truths are the leaſt regarded. They are ſo familiar to us, that they have no Effect, but when placing them in a ſtronger Light awakens us into a diſtincter Attention to them. But eſpecially what affords us no Pleaſure, as our Duty too ſeldom doth, we are very apt to paſs over as ſlightly, as poſſible. The World attracts our Eye with a vaſt Variety of Objects, infinitely more agreeable: to theſe we give up our whole Souls, and are totally loſt in vehement Purſuits or vain Amuſements. The ſerious Conſideration, what we ought to do in Life; and what will follow, if we do it not; ſeldom preſents itſelf to us, and is little encouraged, when it doth. If we think, it is of other Matters: if we read, it is for other Purpoſes: if we have Friends, they will ſcarce look on it as their Buſineſs to be more concerned for us, than we are for ourſelves: or, if they were, often they dare not attempt to ſet us right: and too often they, who paſs for ſuch, are moſt artfully induſtrious to lead us wrong. Then, beſides the Multitudes of thoſe who

who are almoſt abſolutely inattentive to their Duty, how many are there, who impoſe on themſelves with flattering Imaginations, that they perform it faithfully, when they do not: blind to Faults and Defects, that every one elſe diſcerns in them: proud of merely ſeeming, or merely ſuperficial, good Qualities; and having the *Name* and Shew of *living*, while indeed they *are dead*[h]! Now both the thoughtleſs and the preſumptuous muſt be brought to a right Senſe of their Condition, or they are ruined for ever: and what can be ſo likely to do this, as the Voice of public Inſtruction, crying loudly in their Ears; calling the former from Follies and Vanities to the true Buſineſs of Life, and warning the latter againſt fatal Self-deceit? Admonitions from this Place confeſſedly are founded on ſuch an Authority, as warrants us in delivering them with a Spirit and Boldneſs, that Men would not bear in private: and no Part of our Diſcourſes being ever levelled at any one in particular, we can decently and inoffenſively reprove, with whatever Freedom is requiſite, the Errors of all in general; *ſhewing the People their Tranſgreſſion, and the Houſe of Jacob their Sins*[i].

[h] Rev. iii. 1. [i] Iſ. lviii. 1.

But,

But, ſuppoſing Men both acquainted with their Duty, and attentive to their Failures; they may ſtill have great Need of being directed, what Method to take in Order to a Reformation. Not every one, that deſires to become good, any more than every one that deſires to become healthy, knows the eaſieſt and ſafeſt and ſpeedieſt Way to it. Here again therefore ſuch, as have made it their Study, may do great Service: animating the dejected, confirming the doubtful, ſtrengthening the weak: informing each, what particular Dangers are in their Circumſtances moſt to be feared, and by what Means to be avoided; when to fly from Temptation, when to ſtand their Ground againſt it; how to gain Advantages, how to retrieve Loſſes, how to bear up under tedious and ſevere Trials; and become, at Length, in all Things, more than Conquerors. Few, it may be feared, are ſerious enough to think of theſe Helps with the Regard, which they deſerve. But ſome, however, God be thanked, both ſee their Uſefulneſs, and have experienced it. Things of this Nature, indeed, are often moſt effectually taught in private: but public Inſtruction alſo, from Time to Time, enters

enters far into the Particulars of them: though it is, and ought to be, more usually employed in furnishing the more general Means and Motives to Piety and Virtue: opposing to the vehement Passions that assault Men, such lively Representations, as every one cannot make to himself, of the Reasonableness, the Beauty, the Excellency, the Rewards of Religion; the Absurdity, the Deformity, the present Mischiefs, the future Punishments of Sin: stripping each Vice of its specious Disguises, and refuting its plausible Pretences: administering Consolation under the Difficulties of Duty, and the Afflictions of Life: and placing, in a strong Light, both the Glories and the Terrors, that are *ready to be revealed*[k].

Such are the natural Benefits of religious Instruction: and evidently none can be greater. If it answers its End but imperfectly, and hath often been abused to serve bad Purposes: every good Thing in the World is equally liable to the same Charge. Against Abuses, it is perhaps no where better guarded, than in this Nation: nor hath ever been freer from them, than at this Time. Imperfections will always be

[k] 1 Pet. i. 5.

found

found in what Men are to execute: and will in all Cases be represented by many, as greater than they are. Particularly in the present, some will affect to shew their own Wisdom, in censuring what the public Wisdom hath appointed: some will revenge themselves, by condemning an Institution, which must condemn the Notions they advance, and the Lives they lead: some will be prejudiced to its Disadvantage by personal or Party Interests: and others will be provoked, by Dislike of particular Men, to hate the very Office they sustain; or, by Disapprobation of some Parts of an Establishment, to inveigh against the Whole. And very commonly they, who afford themselves the fewest Opportunities of being acquainted with public Instruction, are loudest in their Complaints, of the wrong and wretched Manner, in which it is given. Now a candid, or an upright Man, would never think himself at Liberty, either to find Faults without impartial Examination, or to exaggerate those which he might apprehend he did find. And a good, or even a prudent Man, far from laying too great a Stress on accidental, or small, Defects and Inconveniences, would labour to conceal, unless it were in Order to remedy,

whatever appeared amiſs, in a Thing of ſuch general Uſefulneſs. For, if teaching Truth, and cautioning againſt Error; if ſetting before Men their Duty, and their Intereſt; if directing them how to ſucceed in their Views, and how to eſcape Dangers; if ſupporting them in a right Courſe of Action, and deterring them from a wrong one, be of Service in any of our Concerns; it muſt be of moſt Service in the moſt important one of all, Religion. And whoever hath Need, either to be taught what he did not ſufficiently know, or to be reminded of what he did not ſufficiently conſider; to be reſtrained from doing Evil, or excited to do Good; to be comforted under the Afflictions of Life, or encouraged againſt the Fears of Death; may certainly be the better, if he will, for the preaching of God's Word. There are few, one ſhould imagine, ſo perfect, as not to have Room left for receiving Advantage from it, in ſome of theſe Ways. And whoever conceives he is, cannot with any Decency tell the World ſo; which in Effect he doth, by ſtaying away from it. At leaſt, he cannot think the Bulk of Mankind hath attained to this Height of Knowledge and Goodneſs: and therefore he ought to countenance, by his Example, what may

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in all Likelihood be of the greateſt Benefit to thoſe amongſt whom he lives; and, in Proportion as it amends and improves them, will be of no ſmall Benefit to himſelf.

For, that Inſtruction always hath had, and will have, a mighty Influence on the Belief and Practice of Mens Duty, not only the Nature of the Thing, but the Teſtimony of all Hiſtory, ſacred and profane, ſhews. Our firſt Parents were inſtructed by their Creator. Had they not; how quick ſoever the Improvements of a ſelf-taught Philoſopher may be, when deſcribed from mere Imagination, yet Reaſon and Fact make it highly probable, that even had they continued innocent, they would have been very ignorant for a conſiderable Time. But the Entrance of Sin muſt enfeeble and darken their Underſtandings greatly: and had their Knowledge of what they were to do, been ever ſo clear, yet, what they were to expect, and on what Terms, when they had failed of doing it, muſt be ſo very obſcure, that it was of the utmoſt Importance for God to interpoſe and inform them; as we find in Scripture he did by the immediate Notification of a Redeemer. Divine Inſtruction therefore began Religion; and human hath preſerved it. Hence that honourable Character,

given to *Abraham* by God himſelf: *For I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Houſehold after him; and they ſhall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Juſtice and Judgement* [l]. This pious Care, for which he was diſtinguiſhed, ſeems to have been falling into Diſregard amongſt the other Men of that Age. And the Conſequence was, what it always will be. The Separation of Inſtruction from Worſhip ſeparated Morals from Piety: and, when this unnatural Divorce brought them to be conſidered, as independent Things, the Obligations to Virtue were fatally weakened, the Notions of Religion were greatly corrupted, and, in Proportion as Ignorance increaſed, Wickedneſs and Superſtition prevailed.

Still there were, in the Heathen World, Perſons very eminent for great and good Qualities. And as no ſtated public Inſtruction was eſtabliſhed among them [m]; they are ſometimes produced, as Arguments againſt the Need of it. But their Number by no Means appears to have been conſiderable. Leſs had been ſaid of them, if the Generality of their Countrymen had been like them: and what is ſaid, is delivered by Au-

[l] Gen. xviii. 19.

[m] See Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 2. c. 4, 6, 7. 16, 22, 26.

thors,

thors, chiefly desirous of gaining Honour to themselves, by drawing beautiful Pictures of the Merit of their Heroes. Yet, after all, we find that Merit, even according to the most favourable Accounts of it, which heighten it far beyond Truth[n], mixed with great Blemishes. Their Piety, the first Article of human Duty, if they had any, (for several of their Systems of Philosophy were inconsistent with or unfavourable to it) was grossly idolatrous: their Love of their Country was greatly injurious to their Neighbours; especially those whom they were pleased to call Barbarians: most of them were polluted with unlawful, some with unnatural, Lusts: and none of them ever shewed that Humility of Heart, and deep Sense of Imperfection and Sin, which belongs to the very best of human Creatures. Still, shining Accomplishments they undoubtedly had: but they had also generally private Instructors at least, from whose Lessons they might in a good Measure derive them: or copied them, though not taught in Form, from those, with whom they conversed. Or supposing the contrary; in every Science, in every common Art, some few will make a great Progress with small Advantages for it: but shall

[n] See Leland against Tindal, Introd. p. 46, &c.

we conclude from thence, that any Sort of Knowledge can become general, without being generally taught; and every one do what no one is exhorted, or assisted, to learn? Besides, the original Poverty and Frugality, the accidental Necessities and Distresses, nay the unaccountable Fashions and Fancies of some Countries and Ages, have brought particular Virtues into Practice and high Repute, and they have been greatly celebrated for them; though deserving of the severest Censure for their Faults in other Respects. And, bad as we are at present; it would be doing us great Injustice, to prefer upon the Whole, perhaps the best of the Heathen Times, but certainly the common Run of them, to ours. The Number is great in itself, though small in Comparison, of such as infinitely excel, in Piety, in Benevolence, in Purity of Heart, the utmost Perfection, to which Men, without the Grace of the Gospel, could attain. But not to insist on these, we are without Question in general not only more rational in our Devotions, but milder in our Treatment of each other, and more regular in our Conduct of ourselves. An impartial Reader of the *Greek* and *Roman* Authors, especially of such as lived in the Times of which they speak, will easily

see

ſee and acknowledge this. But were it otherwiſe, their wanting Inſtruction, and our having it, cannot poſſibly be the Reaſon, that we are inferior to them: but we, without it, ſhould have been ſtill much worſe; and they, with it, ſtill much better. Indeed, they were ſenſible, whatever we are, how great Need they had of it: and accordingly the beſt of them, ſome after taking long Journeys to inform themſelves, made it their Buſineſs to teach others, who applied to them, the wiſeſt Rules they could, for the Conduct of Life. But they plainly found, both their Knowledge ſo imperfect, and their Authority ſo inſufficient; that they declared, of their own Accord, what many now ſet themſelves to deny; that Interpoſition from above was requiſite to inform and influence Mankind.

This Advantage the Poſterity of *Abraham* enjoyed. And though they did not receive from it near the Good they might; as indeed we none of us ever do from any Advantage; yet it produced, beſides the more diſtinguiſhed Examples of Piety and Holineſs, mentioned in Scripture, and doubtleſs many others, a conſiderable Degree of national Faith in the one true God, and Obedience to his Laws; which was not only a Bleſſing to that ſingle Country, but

ſcattered ſome Rays of Light through all the People, that ſat in Darkneſs round them. And no ſooner had they learnt from their Captivity, inflicted on them for their Neglect of the divine Commands, to ſet up and carry on a more conſtant and extenſive Courſe of Inſtruction, than they had done before, by *reading* and interpreting the Scriptures *every Sabbath Day in the Synagogues*[o] of every City; than their inveterate, and till then incurable, Diſeaſe of Idolatry ceaſed from amongſt them almoſt intirely; and they preſerved for many Ages a more uniform Regard to their Duty, than they ſeem to have had, ever ſince they were a Nation.

But at Length, even this Method of Inſtruction being corrupted by the eſtabliſhed Diſpenſers of it, *the Light* itſelf *became Darkneſs*[p]. And then was the proper Seaſon for the great Enlightener of the World to appear: who detected and condemned the Abuſes of this Inſtitution, placed the Conduct of it in better Hands, and forbad his Followers for ever that blind Submiſſion to *the Doctrines of Men, which had made the Commandments of God of no Effect*[q]. Nor did he only purify, but perfect it with ineſtimable Additions of new

[o] Acts xv. 21. [p] Matth. vi. 23. [q] Matth. xv. 6, 9.

Knowledge;

Knowledge: whence he tells his Apoſtles, immediately after the Text: *Verily I ſay unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have deſired to ſee thoſe Things which ye ſee, and have not ſeen them; and to hear thoſe Things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* After which, his concluding Care was to provide, by due Regulations, for the perpetual Support of this Ordinance; and promiſe the Miniſters of it, that *he would be with them alway, even unto the End of the World*[r]. We are therefore not only to eſteem it, as a prudent and uſeful Thing; but to reverence it, as the Appointment of our Lord and Maſter; and attend on it in faithful Expectation of his Bleſſing. For under whatever Diſadvantages of human Weakneſs the Goſpel is often preached, it is ſtill *the Power of God unto Salvation*[s], to all that hear it, as they ought. Nor can we hope, that he who *reſiſteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble*[t], will give it thoſe, who ſet up their own Wiſdom againſt that of Heaven; which hath expreſsly ordained *Paſtors and Teachers, for the Edifying of the Body of Chriſt*[u]. And ſo effectually did this Method, unaſſiſted by human Art or

[r] Matth. xxviii. 20. [s] Rom. i. 16. [t] James iv. 6. [u] Eph. iv. 11, 12.

Power,

Power, build up the Church in Spite of all Oppoſition of every Kind; that, in a ſmall Compaſs of Time, the Chriſtian Faith was diffuſed through the Earth, drove Atheiſm, Idolatry and Vice into Corners, wherever it appeared; and planted in their Stead, rational Piety, benevolent Virtue, moral Self-government, founded on the ſure Proſpect of eternal Felicity.

Happy would Mankind have been, had the Purity and good Influence of this excellent Doctrine been preſerved, by a careful Uſe of the Means, that recommended it firſt. But, by Degrees, Preachers *handled the Word of God deceitfully* [w], and Hearers *turned away their Ears from the Truth unto Fables* [x]: Inſtruction was partly perverted, partly diſuſed: Error and Superſtition returned in a new Form, and Ignorance and Wickedneſs again overſpread the World. Once more, two Centuries ago, the Reſtoration of a preaching Miniſtry reſtored Truth and Freedom amongſt us: and keeping up a due Reſpect for it, is our great Security againſt the dreadful Alternative of open Profaneneſs and Profligateneſs, or Popiſh Darkneſs and Tyranny: the former of which Evils, in all Likelihood, if ever it prevails, will ſoon

[w] 2 Cor. iv. 2. [x] 2 Tim. iv. 4.

make

make Way for the latter. And therefore religious Inſtruction, which guards us at once againſt both, is a moſt important public Good.

Its private Advantage to particular Perſons ſeems indeed often to be ſmall. Multitudes there are, as bad, notwithſtanding it, as one can well imagine they would be without it: and for this Reaſon ſome deny its Benefit. But ſurely it is a ſtrange Objection againſt the Uſefulneſs of a Medicine, that they who refuſe to take it, or neglect to take it regularly, are never the better for it. Many deſpiſe and ridicule this Inſtitution; and yet from Time to Time gravely complain of the little Good it doth, whilſt they are diligently endeavouring, that it ſhall do ſtill leſs. And of the reſt of Mankind, few attend it ſo conſtantly as they ought, and fewer ſtill with a due Degree of right Diſpoſition. Yet after all, the Number made truly and inwardly religious and virtuous by it, is not contemptible; thoſe that are amended in Part, or kept back from being miſchievouſly wicked, are very large: and in how much worſe a Condition we ſhould quickly be, were it laid aſide, is abundantly more eaſy to foreſee, than ſafe to try. Too much Trial indeed we

have had already: more than enough to find, that as the Contempt of God's Word and Worſhip increaſes, Idleneſs, Debauchery, Diſhoneſty, ſpread through the Generality of Mankind: Evils, which one ſhould think every one is greatly concerned to prevent, but eſpecially the upper Part of the World, both for the Sake of their Inferiors and their own. How far the ſame bad Conſequences have taken Place amongſt themſelves, might perhaps appear diſreſpectful to ſay: but we may ſurely beg, that they and all Men would ſeriouſly conſider, what one good Effect they have ever obſerved to follow from diſregarding the appointed Exerciſes of Religion: in what better Way the Time, allotted for theſe Exerciſes, is generally employed by thoſe, who frequent them not; and what Harm could poſſibly follow, if, from Obedience to the Command of God, from a Reſpect to public Authority, from Concern for public Welfare, from Tenderneſs for their own private Reputation, and (may we not add?) from Hope of poſſibly receiving ſome little Improvement too, they ſhould prevail on themſelves to ſpend at Church, every Week, a few of thoſe Hours, which they do not ſeem, on other Occaſions, to reckon ſo very precious. Doing this, and

requiring

requiring thoſe who depend on you to do it alſo, you cannot have Occaſion to regret very bitterly: omitting it, whatever you think now, perhaps you may, certainly you will, repent: God grant the Time may come, before it is too late. Let us therefore now make this, amongſt others, one Trial of our ſpiritual State, whether *we have loved the Habitation of God's Houſe, the Place where his Honour dwelleth*[y]: whether we *receive the Word with all Readineſs of Mind*[z], and *deſire the ſincere Milk of it*, as St. *Peter* expreſſes himſelf, *that we may grow thereby*[a]. If not, let us ſtir up ourſelves to the more conſtant and zealous Practice of a Duty, which the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* enjoins as an indiſpenſable one, even in the Midſt of ſevere Perſecutions: with whoſe Words I conclude. *Let us hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering, and provoke one another unto Love and good Works, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the Manner of ſome is, but exhorting one another: and ſo much the more, as ye ſee the Day approaching*[b].

[y] Pſ. xxvi. 8. [z] Acts xvii. 11. [a] 1 Pet. ii. 2.
[b] Heb. x. 23, 24, 25.

SER-

SERMON XII.

LUKE viii. 18.

Take Heed therefore how ye hear.

EVERY Advantage, beſtowed on us by Providence, is a Truſt, of which we muſt hereafter give Account. The Advantages, which tend more immediately to our Improvement in Piety and Virtue, are a Truſt of the moſt important Kind: and religious Inſtruction holds a principal Rank amongſt theſe. Its Nature is excellently fitted to do Men Good: the Grace of God is ever ready to accompany it: and yet very frequently it fails of its End. Doubtleſs too often this is our Fault, who are employed to diſpenſe it. We do not preach, we do not live, as we ſhould: may God be merciful to us and amend us: for heavy will be our Condemnation, if we wilfully tranſgreſs, or ſupinely

pinely neglect, either Part of our Duty. But the Word of God, even when delivered by unskilful and wicked Hands, hath Power enough to produce its Effect, if received as it ought: and though delivered by the ableſt and beſt, too commonly, for Want of being ſo received, produces none. *Preachers of Righteouſneſs*, from the Days of *Noah*[a] to this, have found their Warnings in a great Meaſure fruitleſs. Prophets, expreſsly commiſſioned from Heaven, have been rejected or diſregarded by thoſe, to whom they were ſent. Nay, the Son of God himſelf, as indeed his whole Hiſtory, but eſpecially his Parable in this Chapter ſhews, met with many, in whoſe Hearts his Doctrine either gained no Reception, or ſoon withered away, or was choked with Thorns; for a few, who brought forth good Fruit, in a greater Degree or a leſs. And if it was needful for him, who *ſpake as never Man did*[b], who confirmed his Diſcourſes by Miracles, and adorned both by a Life of perfect Holineſs, to bid his Apoſtles themſelves *take Heed, how they heard*: much more ought his Miniſters now to give his People the ſame Caution, and they to obſerve it. You think, and very truly, that a great deal is incumbent on us: but do

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 5. [b] John vii. 46.

you

you consider, what is incumbent on yourselves? Our Reasons to desire that our Preaching may be successful, are very strong: but yours are yet stronger. If we fail of converting you, provided we endeavour it faithfully, we have *delivered our own Souls:* but if you fail of being converted, you *die in your Iniquity*[c]. The Gospel is *the Savour of Life or of Death*[d], to all that hear it. Those, who are careful to improve by it, God will bless with further Improvements: those, who are not, he will leave in his just Judgement to grow worse and worse: or, to speak the Language of our Saviour just after the Text: *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

Being therefore so deeply concerned in the Matter, let us all consider, with what Disposition of Heart we ought to receive religious Instruction.

1. And, in the first Place, that we should hearken to it with Attention, is exceedingly plain: for else both speaking and hearing are lost Labour. And yet how many are there, who vouchsafe not even so much Regard to the Doctrine of Salvation? Decency perhaps brings

[c] Ezek. iii. 19. [d] 2 Cor. ii. 16.

us hither: and a Failure of making our Appearance might be remarked to our Diſadvantage: but whether our Minds are abſent, cannot be ſo eaſily obſerved: and therefore about that, we are very indifferent. Or we come of Courſe; without reflecting, what End is deſigned to be ſerved by it: and, though our Conſciences would not let us ſtay away, yet we have never bethought ourſelves, that being here without any Care to become the wiſer for it, amounts very nearly to the ſame Thing. Moſt however have ſurely ſome general Intention of minding what they are about: but in ſo weak a Degree, that every Suggeſtion of every Kind overpowers it. Some ſet their Hearts on the Affairs, and ſome on the Pleaſures of Life ſo intirely, that theſe Objects croud in at the moſt improper Times, and drive out all others. Too many have indulged an indolent Thoughtleſsneſs, till applying their Minds in earneſt to any Thing is become extremely difficult and painful to them. Not a few are engaged ſo deeply in Obſervation of what they ſee at Church, that they have no Room left for taking Notice of what they hear. There are Perſons too, who have ſo much to ſay one to another, that they loſe, and make thoſe around them loſe, much of what the

Preacher

Preacher hath to ſay to them all. And frequent mutual Informations, it ſeems, are of ſuch Importance and Neceſſity to be communicated immediately, that even the Duties of hearkening to God's Word in the Leſſons, and ſinging his Praiſes in the Pſalms, muſt give Way to them. But indeed the beſt diſpoſed, and moſt conſiderate, are not ſo happy always, as to command their own Thoughts. Our Imaginations, however carefully checked, are too apt, on every Occaſion, to preſent us with a Multiplicity of Fancies and Notions, quite foreign to the Buſineſs we are upon: but never more ſo, than in the Midſt of our religious Exerciſes. And when once our Minds are got looſe; an Effect, which the leaſt Accident will produce; then on they run from one Thing to another, hanging together by ſome Kind of whimſical Connection, till we are carried we know not whither: and, if we try to recover ourſelves, are often loſt a ſecond Time in the very Endeavour. Some Degree of this is merely the Weakneſs of our fallen Condition: and ſome have by Nature more of it than others: for which they have indeed Cauſe to be ſorry, yet not to think deſpondingly of their ſpiritual Condition. But ſtill, too much of it is commonly our own Fault. We

have taught ourſelves to be ſo unſettled as we are, by indulging a languid Indifference to the moſt intereſting of all our Concerns; and perhaps too, by delighting in the vain Amuſement, which theſe roving Ideas give us, at the moſt improper Seaſons. The Cure of this bad Habit is very difficult: and therefore our Watchfulneſs againſt its growing upon us ought to be the greater; and our Attempts to root it out, more cloſely followed. We muſt beg of God Pardon for our paſt Neglects, and Aſſiſtance for the Time to come. We muſt imprint on our Minds, beforehand, as deeply as ever we can, the Importance of Inſtruction in our Duty: and come to it with the moſt deliberate and firmeſt Purpoſe of ſtrict Attention. We muſt call ourſelves back immediately, when we find we are wandering: and, without ſtaying at all to diſcover what it was, that led us off, return without Delay to the Subject before us. We muſt alſo make it a Rule to recollect afterwards the principal Things, that have been ſaid to us. For not only this will tie us down to mind them the more, when they are ſpoken; but minding them ever ſo much juſt then, will ſingly be of ſmall Benefit: we muſt think them over and over at Home, till we digeſt them into laſting Nouriſhment;

ment; and, as the Apoſtle directs, give ſuch *earneſt Heed to the Things which we have heard*, that we may not, *at any Time, let them ſlip* [e].

2. But hearing God's Word with Attention will probably do us no Good, unleſs, in the ſecond Place, we hear it alſo without Prejudice againſt it: for elſe we ſhall attend to it, only to find Fault, invent Objections, and ſo lead ourſelves into Error; which may be worſe than Ignorance. Now unreaſonable Partiality is Blame-worthy in all Caſes: but extremely ſo, when it operates to the Diſadvantage of Religion. The Doctrines of natural Piety and Morality are confeſſedly of the plaineſt and greateſt Uſe to the preſent Peace and Comfort, as well as the future Happineſs, of Mankind. And thoſe which Revelation hath added, illuſtrate, confirm, and ſupply the Defects of the former, in the moſt perfect Degree. Prepoſſeſſion therefore againſt either, is Oppoſition to our own chief Good, to that of the World in general: and every worthy, every prudent Man, who at all underſtands what Chriſtianity is, cannot but hearken to it with Delight, and heartily wiſh to find it true; and when he is convinced it is, deſire to have it conſtantly inculcated on himſelf and his Fellow-

[e] Heb. ii. 1.

creatures, throughout the Earth. To vain and vicious Minds indeed hearing it faithfully preached must give Uneasiness. But still such Preaching is the most real, the most seasonable and necessary Kindness, that can be done them. Unwelcome Truths will be never the less Truths, but much the more dreadful, for their studying to disbelieve them. And therefore the wicked, beyond all others, are concerned, to take Notice of the Threatenings of the Gospel, lay hold on its Mercies, and examine their Lives by its Precepts; whenever they know, or but suspect, they have acted wrong. Nay, suppose they have no Suspicion of that Sort, yet unprejudiced Attention to the Preaching of it can do them no Harm; and may do them more Good, than they think of. We require no implicit Submission to what we teach. We warn you against it. So far as our Doctrine is discerned by your Reason, or felt by your Consciences, to be true; or appears to stand on the Testimony of God; so far only believe us. *We speak as to wise Men: judge ye what we say* [f]. All that we ask is, judge uprightly. For Prepossession hurries People to condemn, what they will not have Patience to understand:

[f] 1 Cor. x. 15.

they

they imagine Articles of Faith to be unintelligible, and Rules of Life to be unreaſonable, without the leaſt Foundation; and alarm themſelves and others with Phantoms, the mere Creatures of their own Fancies.

But though irreligious Prejudices always prevail too much: yet there are Times, when Faſhion gives a more than ordinary Countenance to them: when all, that would make a genteel Figure, muſt throw aſide the antiquated Notions of learning their Duty; and think, or ſeem to think, ill or meanly of thoſe who are to teach it. Now whether you have Need to learn any Thing which you did not know, or be reminded of any Thing which you had forgotten, or be excited to any Thing which you neglect, or diſſuaded from any Thing which you practiſe, I muſt leave to your own Conſciences. The Word of God, the Wiſdom of all civilized Nations, the Judgement and Experience of all wiſe Men declare that every one hath Need of theſe Things. And as for us, whoſe Buſineſs is to teach: paying us too much Regard, we acknowledge, is a dangerous Temptation to us; and may do, and hath done, great Harm to true Religion, to Virtue, to human Society: but paying us too little, is full as likely to do

Harm. And we appeal to yourſelves: which Extreme are the People of this Land at preſent moſt inclined to? Certainly you ought to have your Eyes open to our Faults and Imperfections; elſe they will increaſe: but you ought to conſider at the ſame Time, how difficult it is for any Set of Men, and for us in particular, to behave ſo unblameably, as we ſhould. And indeed while we diſcharge our Office with any good Degree of Faithfulneſs, the beneficial Nature of it ſhould methinks intitle us to ſome peculiar Share of the Good-will and Candour of Mankind. At leaſt, no one ſhould, either deſignedly or inconſiderately, make ſuch harſh Interpretations of what we ſay or do, as would be univerſally thought unjuſt, or uncharitable, with Reſpect to any other Men. For ſuch Treatment will not only injure us, but make us in a great Meaſure uſeleſs to thoſe under our Care: which is a Matter of public Concern. They, who are inſtructed or admoniſhed by one, of whom they think amiſs, let him lay before them ever ſo important Truths, very ſeldom take much Notice of them. Yet this is one Prejudice againſt which you ought to guard with your beſt Diligence. The *Scribes* and *Phariſees* were both ill Men, and our Saviour's bittereſt Enemies: yet

yet since they *sat in Moses' Seat*, were the authorized Instructors of the People, he commanded his Disciples to *observe and do whatsoever* Duties *they bade them* [g]. Ask your own Hearts then, are you thus disposed in Relation to every Truth, which you hear from us; of whom, we hope, you have Cause to entertain a somewhat better Opinion, than of them?

But they, who have no general Prejudice against religious Instruction or the Dispensers of it, have notwithstanding too often very blameable Antipathies to particular Subjects. Some are highly pleased, when we enlarge on Points of Faith: but hate to hear those of Practice much enforced. Others are for practical Discourses only: and forget, that Faith is the necessary Foundation of them; and if it were not, that God hath the same Right to our believing what he teaches, as to our doing what he requires. Some would have Preaching consist wholly of moral Doctrines; and hold Piety in Contempt, as an useless enthusiastical Thing: though both Reason and Scripture say, it *is the first and great Commandment* [h]. Others despise Morality, as an inferior heathenish Attainment: and think only the sublimer Parts of

[g] Matth. xxiii. 2, 3. [h] Matth. xxii. 38.

Religion

Religion ſhould be taught: though the Apoſtle ſaith expreſsly, *I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they, who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good Works: theſe Things are good and profitable unto Men*[1]. Many will pay great Attention to the gracious Promiſes of the Goſpel: but little or none to its Laws and Threatenings. Or, if they are willing we ſhould dwell on ſome Precepts, which not they, but their Neighbours, tranſgreſs; ſtill they turn a deaf Ear to all that can be ſaid on others: and one would except his unjuſt Gains, a ſecond his vicious Pleaſures, a third his vain Amuſements, a fourth his Ill-humour, a fifth his cauſeleſs Separation, from being any proper Matter of our Animadverſion. In ſhort, with moſt Hearers, ſome Points are in ſuch Favour, that they can hardly be repeated too often, or carried too far: and others ſo unwelcome, that the very Mention of them gives Offence. They have not Patience enough to diſcern the true State of the Queſtion: much leſs to obſerve the Force of the Arguments for it; or conſider the Anſwers to their Objections againſt it: but reject immediately with Anger, whatever thwarts their Inclination, or preconceived Opinion: un-

[1] Tit. iii. 8.

mindful

mindful of the Prophet's Reproof to the Jews of old: *This is a rebellious People, that will not hear the Law of the Lord: which say to the Seers, See not: and to the Prophets, Prophesy not unto us right Things, speak unto us smooth Things, prophesy Deceits* [k]. But however apt we are to think otherwise, both our Business and our Interest is, not to shut our Eyes against Instruction, but make Use of the Light it offers; not to fence against Conviction, but lay open our Hearts to the Impression of Truth, be it ever so painful; *and receive with Meekness the ingrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls* [l]. For those Duties, which we the least like to hear of, may be, and often are, the most needful to be inculcated upon us of all others. Those Doctrines, of which we are the most firmly persuaded, may, for ought we know, unless we have examined them well, be great Mistakes. And even supposing them true, yet attending only to one Part of the Truth, may lead us into Error.

3. The third Disposition, requisite in attending on the Word of God, is Seriousness of Heart. There are many, who have no positive Prejudices, founded on seeming Arguments against it, but so thoughtless and giddy, that

[k] Is. xxx. 9, 10. [l] James i. 21.

they ſlight it moſt ſurpriſingly. At beſt, they look on what is delivered from hence, as ſomething of Courſe to be ſaid, and not to be minded. But in their livelier Moods they can divert themſelves extremely with the moſt ſolemn Exhortations; and their Gaiety is apt to riſe the higher, the more earneſtly their Duty is preſſed upon them. Now undoubtedly the Exertion of a cheerful Temper, when regulated by good Senſe and Propriety, is very innocent, as well as agreeable. But to ſeek for Matter of Drollery in every Thing; and dreſs up Subjects of the utmoſt Importance in ludicrous Diſguiſes, to delight ourſelves and others with laughing at them, is the ſilliest Affectation of Wit, and the moſt dangerous Kind of Folly. Remember then: what your Maker enjoins, what your eternal Happineſs or Miſery depends on, is worthy of the moſt awful Attention, even of the moſt ſprightly Mind: beſides that the ſame Levity, which inclines Men to play thus with religious Truths, uſually diſpoſes them to treat the weightieſt Affairs of common Life with the ſame Sort of ſportful Indiſcretion, till at Length *the End of that Mirth is Heavineſs*[m], even in this World.

[m] Prov. xiv. 13.

Some-

Sometimes indeed Want of ſerious Regard to what we hear, may not ſeem altogether inexcuſable. Subjects of the greateſt Moment may be handled ſo improperly, as to diſguſt even the well-meaning; and poſſibly raiſe contemptuous, inſtead of devout Reflections. But as it muſt be a very wrong Heart, that takes Occaſion to be thus moved, where none is given: ſo if much be given, which ſurely is not frequently the Caſe, it cannot be a right Heart, which dwells on ſuch Things only, or chiefly. Conſider: here you come, in Obedience to the Appointment of God, to learn or recollect the Doctrines and the Precepts, that lead to Salvation. One or more of them are accordingly laid before you and recommended to you: but unhappily with ſome Peculiarity, it may be, of Phraſe or Manner; ſome Arguments not of the ſtrongeſt, ſome Irregularity of Method, or Want of Livelineſs or Prudence: in ſhort, ſome Mixture or other of human Infirmity. Ought theſe Defects, be they ever ſo real, though poſſibly after all they are but imaginary, to change the important Buſineſs you are upon, into an ill-natured Amuſement: and turn you aſide, from the Improvement of your own Souls, to an idle Criticiſm upon another Man's Performance? Or is it

the

the Concern of every one of us, to profit by all we can, supply what is wanting, add Strength to what is weak; and pass lightly over the Imperfections of our Instructors, remembering our own?

But they, who by no Means hear Sermons with Contempt, will yet be far from due Seriousness, if they hear them only with Curiosity. And this it may be feared is a very common Case. We want to have some fashionable Controversy discussed, some difficult Passage of Scripture explained, some darling Speculation enlarged on, some plausible Hypothesis proposed: in a Word something told us, that may prove a pleasing Exercise of our Understandings at the Time, and a Help to Conversation afterwards. Discourses, of which we can make this Use, we seldom think of putting to any better: of such as we cannot, we soon grow weary, and hearken impatiently after other *Teachers*, *having*, as the Apostle expresses it, *itching Ears* [n]. Thus we pay most earnest Attention to what we hear: and receive absolutely no Good from it. For filling our Heads, in this Manner, is rather the Way to corrupt our Hearts, than to amend them. Learning and Ingenuity are doubtless

[n] 2 Tim. iv. 3.

of

of great Service in explaining, defending, and adorning Religion. But ſtill the Things, which a ſerious Man will chuſe to have moſt inſiſted on in the Pulpit, are thoſe, which he is moſt concerned to practiſe, and moſt liable to fail in, the plain common Rules of a Chriſtian Life. There is Nothing new perhaps in ſuch Diſcourſes: Nothing, but what you have often heard and well remember. But have you minded it as effectually as you ought? Searching into this may poſſibly be new enough to you; how agreeable, God and yourſelves know beſt: but it is needful, without Queſtion. Repeating to you ever ſo often the Precepts, which you are conſcious you obſerve, will give you Pleaſure. And the more unpleaſing the Repetition of the reſt is, the more neceſſary it will be. "This Kind of Preaching hath no Entertainment in it." Very true. But is it for Entertainment that you come to the Houſe of God? Such as do, muſt not take it amiſs to be diſappointed; but ſubmit, inſtead of what they wiſh, to have what they want, given them; the Knowledge of their Duty, their Sins, their Saviour, their Grounds of Hope or Fear in Relation to Eternity. At leaſt, whatever they might like for themſelves,

they

they must permit others to *have the Gospel preached to them* [o].

But supposing you are ever so desirous to hear Sermons ever so proper: on what Account do you desire it? Perhaps only to enjoy the Satisfaction, which a well-composed Discourse naturally affords. Your Ear is gratified, your Sentiments are enlivened, agreeable Emotions of various Kinds are excited. So the Hearer is pleased, the Speaker commended, and followed; but with no Thought of practising one Word he hath said. This is the Turn of Mind, so admirably described, many Ages ago, by the Prophet *Ezekiel*. *Son of Man, the Children of thy People still are talking of thee* [p] *by the Walls and in the Doors of the Houses, and speak one to another, every one to his Brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the Word, that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come and sit before thee as my People; and they hear thy Words, but they will not do them: for with their Mouth they shew much Love, but their Heart goeth after their Covetousness*; their worldly Desires of whatever Sort. *And lo, thou art unto them as a very*

[o] Matth. xi. 5.

[p] This is the marginal, and the right Translation.

lovely

lovely Song, of one that hath a pleaſant Voice, and can play well on an Inſtrument: for they hear thy Words, but they do them not[q]. Religious Inſtruction could never be appointed to give ſuch empty, inſignificant Delight as this: nor doth it in the leaſt attain its proper End, unleſs it influences Men to forget the Preacher, and think of themſelves: unleſs it raiſes in them, not a ſuperficial Complacency, or an idle Admiration; but an awful Solicitude about their eternal Welfare, and that a durable one.

Conſtitutional Warmth of Temper is often blown up into a pious Flame, that goes out almoſt as ſuddenly, as it was kindled. Lively Affections are experienced; excellent Deſigns are formed; every Thing promiſes wonderfully well for a Time; and then ſinks down into Nothing. Or, it may be, Men are moved anew, and reſolve anew, at every good Sermon they hear: but they cool again long before the next, and bring no Fruit to Maturity. Now a Life of religious Feelings and Intentions, with an irreligious Failure of acting ſuitably to

[q] Ezek. xxxiii. 30, 31, 32.
See an excellent Diſcourſe of *Muſonius* the Philoſopher on this Subject. *A. Gell.* l. 5. c. 1. See alſo *Arr. Epict.* l. 3. c. 23. And the Character of *Socrates*'s Diſcourſes given by *Alcibiades* on his own Experience. *Plat. Conviv.* See alſo *Seneca*, Ep. 52.

them, is not the Life of a Chriſtian, nor will it ever procure us the Reward of one.

4. There ſtill remains then a fourth Requiſite, without which, however attentive, impartial, and ſerious, we are, we ſhall fall ſhort; but towards which all theſe Qualities greatly contribute: and what that is, the Apoſtle plainly ſignifies to us, where he ſaith, *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith, in them that heard it*[r]. And the Faith, that we muſt have, to make it profit us, is not a mere hiſtorical Perſuaſion of the Truth of the Goſpel, though with this we are to begin; but a deep Senſe of our Need of God's Mercy promiſed in it; a thankful Acceptance of the Terms, on which that Mercy is offered; an humble Reliance on a crucified Saviour for Pardon, Grace and Strength; with a firm Dependance on having theſe Bleſſings conveyed to us, through a right Uſe of the Means, which he hath ordained for that End; his Word and Sacraments, and Prayer. Such *Faith* indeed muſt *come by hearing* at firſt, as the Apoſtle hath obſerved[s]. But this is no Objection againſt the Neceſſity of exerciſing it afterwards, in Order to hear as we ought: and exerciſing duly our

[r] Heb. iv. 2. [s] Rom. x. 17.

preſent lower Degree of it, is the only Way to obtain a higher. Every one therefore, who deſires Benefit from religious Inſtruction, muſt attend on it with Humility of Heart, as a fallen, ſinful, undeſerving Creature; to whom it makes known a Method of Recovery, which of himſelf he could never have found out or imagined. He muſt *receive it*, when delivered conformably to Scripture, *not as the Word of Men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God*[t], muſt labour to ſtrengthen his Conviction of theſe Things. He muſt apply earneſtly to Him, whoſe Gift Faith is, for that *Faith* in his Goſpel, *which worketh by Love*[u]. For when once we come to love our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, we ſhall hear the very hardeſt Parts of our Duty with willing Minds, and perform the Whole with a cheerful and perſevering Zeal: till which Time, all remains imperfect and ineffectual. Every Attainment that comes ſhort of uniform univerſal Obedience, however ſpecious it be, leaves us in Effect very nearly, if not quite, where we were. St. *James*'s Compariſon is perfectly juſt. *Be ye Doers of the Word: and not Hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves. For if any be a Hearer of the Word, and*

[t] 1 Theſſ. ii. 13. [u] Gal. v. 6.

not a Doer; he is like unto a Man, beholding his natural Face in a Glaſs. For he beholdeth himſelf, and goeth his Way; and ſtraitway forgetteth, what Manner of Man he was[w]. Yet this too plainly appears to be the common Method. A great Part, even of thoſe, who come to hear from a Principle of Conſcience, ſuch as it is, mind exceedingly little at the Time, reflect leſs afterwards, and continue juſt the ſame Men they were before. They wonder indeed, that their Neighbours take no more Notice of what is ſaid; and can even wreſt Paſſages in Sermons to Meanings, which they were never intended to have, and are ſcarce, if at all capable of, in order to point them againſt the Faults of others; while they think not in the leaſt of correcting their own, be they ever ſo plainly deſcribed: as if Religion were made for every one elſe to practiſe, but themſelves. It would really ſeem quite impoſſible, if daily Experience did not ſhew it, that Men could be told ſo plainly, and warned ſo frequently, of Tranſgreſſions and Follies, which they cannot deny to be ſuch, by which often they not only do great Harm, but ſuffer great Uneaſineſs, in this World, and which they are ſenſible muſt bring on them, if

[w] James i. 22, 23, 24.

not

not forsaken, the heaviest Vengeance of God in the next; yet sit all the While as unconcerned, as if the Discourse were about some perfectly indifferent Matter; and go away at last, without so much as a single Thought of ever changing their Conduct. Or if they do think of reforming, it is at some distant Time; like *Felix, when they have a convenient Season**; and this they look on as a very pious Intention: whereas indeed it is only determining to live on wickedly for the present, and leave off they know not when. Or they resolve from henceforward to perform some Parts of their Duty, the more easy, or profitable, or fashionable, perhaps: but neglect the rest, as much as ever. Or they go farther, and will break loose from all their Sins: but they will not avoid those Temptations, that must in all Likelihood bring them back soon into their former Bondage; nor make Use of those Means, that would *preserve* them from it. Thus, one Way or other, they contrive to *hear the Word, and not to do it:* and all they get by this artful Management, as St. *James*, in the Passage above-mentioned, hath excellently observed, is *deceiving their own selves*. For God we can never deceive; Men we very seldom do;

* Acts xxiv. 25.

nay

nay even ourſelves, for the moſt Part, we are able to cheat but poorly; and could we ſucceed in it as completely, as we wiſh, we ſhould be only the more irretrievably ruined.

Take Heed therefore, how ye hear: and begin your Care with conſidering ſo ſeriouſly, and improving ſo faithfully, what hath been delivered to you for that Purpoſe now, that you may reap the trueſt and utmoſt Advantage you can, from whatever ſhall be any where taught you hereafter. *Laying aſide all Malice, and all Guile and Hypocriſy, as new born Babes, deſire the ſincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby*[y]*: grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt: to Him be Glory, both now and for ever. Amen*[z].

[y] 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. [z] 2 Pet. iii. 18.

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.

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